Men-at-Arms

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Japanese Armies 1868–1877

The Boshin War and Satsuma Rebellion

Gabriele Esposito • Illustrated by Giuseppe Rava

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Gabriele Esposito • Illustrated by Giuseppe Rava

Series editor Martin Windrow

JAPANESE ARMIES 1868–1877

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

For some 250 years following the Tokugawa clan's decisive victory over their rivals at Sekigahara in 1600, Japan remained largely isolated from the outside world beyond its immediate neighbours. That battle had confirmed the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu as Japan's *shogun* or dictator, bringing to an end centuries of anarchic feudal warfare between the country's regional aristocratic clans. The emperors and Imperial family, treated with reverent ceremonial honour but exercising few practical functions, lived in luxurious semi-captivity in the ancient capital of Kyoto. Meanwhile the shoguns' regime or *bakufu* actually governed Japan, from the administrative centre of Edo (later renamed Tokyo).

During 15 generations of the hereditary Shogunate between 1600 and 1868 (the 'Edo Period'), the shoguns forbade any contact with the rest of the world outside East Asia, and particularly with the European powers. The arrival in the 1540s of Christian missionaries and Portuguese traders had already had consequences which the Shogunate considered to be negative. Thereafter they prevented virtually all foreign trade (with the exception of a tiny Dutch enclave on the artificial island of Deshima at Nagasaki) – to the growing frustration of the European powers and, eventually, the United States. This isolation came to an abrupt end in May–July 1853, with the arrival of a US Navy squadron under Cdre Matthew Perry. Under the threat of the vastly superior military technology of his 'black ships', the regime finally allowed Perry to land in Edo Bay on 14 July and deliver a letter from US President Fillmore, seeking the establishment of diplomatic and commercial relations. Thus began a period known as the *Bakumatsu* ('the end of the shogunate').

Bakumatsu, 1854–68

After withdrawing to the Chinese coast, Perry returned in greater force on 13 February 1854. Finally, on 31 March 1854, the Convention of Kanagawa was signed between representatives of Shogun Tokugawa Iemochi and the USA: under its terms, the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate were opened to American merchant ships. During the years that followed, the Shogunate signed similar treaties with Britain, France,

The Emperor Meiji (1837–1911), photographed as a youth. After centuries of Imperial passivity, Meiji was the first emperor to successfully oppose the power of the Shogunate in order to restore the original ruling functions of the monarchy. It was he who opened up the country to foreign technologies and institutional concepts, and consequently he is considered today as the true founder of modern Japan. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

Russia and the Netherlands. However, the Japanese had been forced to open their ports only because of their military inferiority, and a strong faction within the country intended the arrangement to last only as long as it took to remedy this imbalance, when they could force the foreigners to revise the unequal treaties. (In fact, some steps had already been taken to modernize Japanese forces – see below, 'Japanese Forces 1840–1868').

The years following renewed Western contact saw the emergence of a deep internal division within Japanese society. On one side were the shogun's Tokugawa clan and its allies, who favoured a controlled opening of the country in order to modernize its resources; on the other were the Imperial family and its allies, who argued against any further concessions to the foreign 'barbarians', and for a stubborn defence of the homeland's honour and traditions against their malign influence.

To achieve their ends the isolationists planned to restore, for the first time in centuries, the effective power of the Emperor of Japan. The Imperial family was supported by major aristocratic clan leaders who had long chafed under the rule of the Shogunate, particularly those whose domains lay in south-western Japan, in Satsuma on the island of Kyushu and Choshu on the main island of Honshu. Starting in 1860, isolationists launched a series of murderous attacks against individual foreigners, who were by now widely active in the country. They believed that these attacks would provoke military intervention by the Western powers, leading to the defeat and removal of the Shogunate to the benefit of the Imperial faction.

(For simplicity, the term 'Western' is used throughout this text for the interventionist powers, although they also included Russia. Similarly, Japanese forces that were modernized according to foreign models are simply described as 'Westernized' – though that process was never more than partial, as they naturally retained strong Japanese features.)

The initial results were as the isolationists had anticipated, with demonstrations of 'gunboat diplomacy' against the shogun's *bakufu*. In September 1862 Charles Richardson, a British merchant, was killed outside Yokohama by a group of Satsuma samurai; this 'Namamugi incident' caused the outbreak of what became known as the 'Anglo-Satsuma War'. The British government demanded £100,000 compensation for the killing; the *bakufu* government finally agreed to pay, in order to avoid a military move against Edo; but the Satsuma clan neither apologized nor made any attempt to arrest the killers. On 6 August 1863, a Royal Navy squadron sailed from Yokohama for Satsuma's main city of Kagoshima. The British warships captured and burned three Satsuma merchant vessels, and then bombarded the port (which had already been evacuated in anticipation). The British commander decided not to land marines, but the Satsuma clan eventually had to pay compensation to the British government.

Conflicts with Choshu, 1863–1866

Meanwhile, in March 1863, the emperor had issued a formal 'order to expel barbarians', in contravention of the shogun's policy, and this unleashed the Choshu clan. All foreigners living in Choshu territory were expelled by the harshest methods, while coastal artillery fired on foreign ships passing through the strategic Shimonoseki Strait. Choshu had some modern artillery (five 8-in Dahlgren guns presented by the United States), and three steam warships built in America, so the attacks on foreign shipping caused damage and casualties. In retaliation, on 16 July 1863 the US Navy attacked the three modern Choshu ships, sinking two of them and severely damaging the third, and on 20 July the French Navy bombarded the Shimonoseki coastal batteries.

Commodore Matthew Perry, USN, the first Western envoy to visit Japan after some 250 years of almost complete isolation. The military capabilities of his squadron during his two enforced visits in 1853–54 determined the course of the late Shogunate, changing Japanese history forever. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

These actions only increased Japanese hatred for foreigners, prompting attacks against Western property and legations. Fearing escalation into a full-scale xenophobic insurrection, the powers formed an international naval squadron with nine British warships, four Dutch, three French, and one American support vessel. On 5–6 September 1864, in the so-called battle of the Shimonoseki Strait, the European warships destroyed most of Choshu's military resources, and on 8 September the domain surrendered after suffering heavy casualties and losing most of their artillery. Moreover, the powers demanded that the Tokugawa Shogunate pay the immense compensation of $3 million (which was, in the event, never paid).

In August 1864, following the first of these setbacks, the Choshu clan had launched a surprise attack against Shogunate troops in the Imperial capital, Kyoto, with the objective of freeing the Emperor Komei from the control of the shogun. This 'Kimmon incident' failed in its aim, but caused the burning down of most of Japan's ancient capital. Enraged by this humiliating threat to the heart of his power, the shogun launched a punitive campaign against the south-western

A French naval officer and seamen photographed in a captured Choshu battery after its occupation during the battle of Shimonoseki Strait in September 1864. Foundries for manufacturing modern guns from foreign plans and prototypes were established in several cities in the latter 1850s. These heavy pieces clearly have carriages with a practical traverse mechanism; other Japanese coastal guns of the period are described as being hampered by having archaic and immobile wooden carriages. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

Contemporary Japanese drawing showing Shogunate troops on the march in 1866 during the so-called 'Second Choshu Expedition'. All the soldiers seem to be samurai dressed in traditional clothing; no armour is visible – but neither are muskets. The high-ranking mounted *seishi* are armed with swords, while the *kashi* on foot are equipped with traditional polearms. Although outnumbered, Choshu soldiers armed with 'Minié' percussion muskets had no difficulty in repulsing them. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

clan in September 1864 (the 'First Choshu Expedition'). In fact, neither side had the means for serious fighting; the instigators of the raid on Kyoto were arrested, but the government did not actually invade Choshu territory.

Tensions became further inflamed during the months that followed, and finally, in June 1866, the shogun launched a 'Second Choshu Expedition' to crush the rebellious clan. Against all odds, the government army was soundly defeated by the Choshu forces, which had recently been modernized in anticipation of the imminent conflict. Many of the feudal contingents making up the Shogunate's army were in fact sympathetic to the isolationist cause, and Choshu and Satsuma soon concluded a secret alliance. Later that year the situation was complicated by the natural deaths of both the Shogun Tokugawa Iemochi and the Emperor Komei.

After this military disaster, it was clear that the Tokugawa Shogunate was facing existential threats which it could only hope to survive if defended by a new and stronger army reformed along Western lines. In an atmosphere of feverish conspiracies among courtiers both in Edo and

The officers and two NCOs of the first French military mission to Japan, photographed in 1866 before their departure. The commander of the mission, Charles Chanoine, stands in the centre; Jules Brunet, the future tactical commander of the short-lived 'Ezo Republic' army, sits second from right in the front row. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

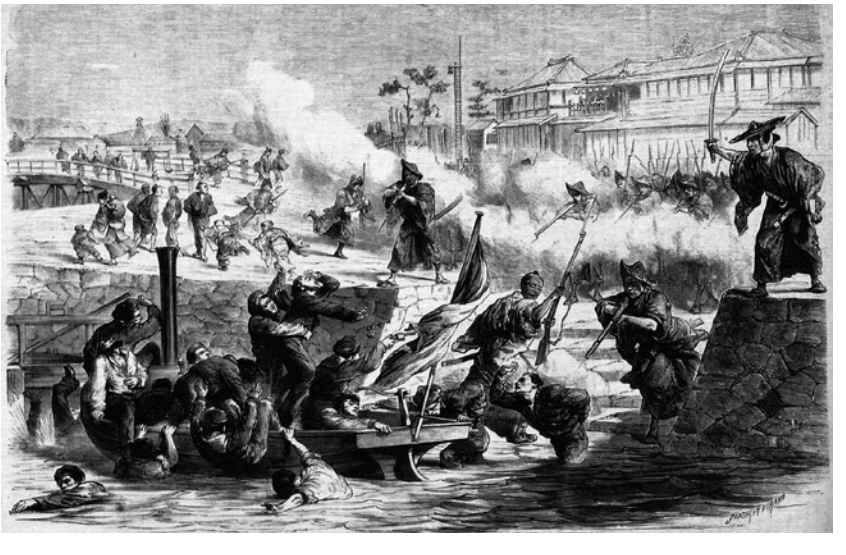
Kyoto, the main players in these disputes were all doing business with foreign arms suppliers and employing a few professional instructors, while Western diplomats competed to further their national agendas.

European military missions

To achieve a measure of modernization, the new shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu invited a French military mission, which arrived in January 1867. It was intended by Napoleon III as a tool to augment France's influence over Japan, but its practical task was impossibly difficult: to re-organize, retrain and modernize the military forces of the Shogunate on a Western model, as soon as possible. At the same time the shogun requested assistance from Britain to modernize his navy, which resulted in the arrival that year of the Royal Navy's so-called Tracey Mission.

The French military mission had just 17 members: an officer of the Imperial General Staff as commander; four other officers (two infantry instructors, one cavalry instructor and one artillery instructor); ten NCOs, and two soldiers. Despite their tiny numbers, in little more than a year this Chanoine Mission were able to train a selected unit of some 900 soldiers, called the *Denshutai,* but the outbreak of the Boshin War in 1868 would prevent them from extending this programme throughout the government's land forces. The military mission would be ordered to leave Japan in October 1868, but five of its officers would decide to remain and fight for the Shogunate during that conflict.

In February 1867 the ambitious 15-year-old Emperor Meiji ascended to the Japanese throne, with the firm intention of restoring the ancient power of the Imperial family. This process, commonly known as the Meiji Restoration, led to the outbreak of the Boshin War in 1868, and to the proclamation of the Japanese Empire the following year. In November 1867, under pressure from Tosa clan leaders who had joined the southern alliance, the shogun formally resigned his authority to the emperor. In practice, however, he was still strong enough in the northern provinces to continue to exert considerable influence, and he had no intention of tamely accepting the ascendancy of the boy emperor to absolute power.



Contemporary engraving showing the so-called 'Sakai incident' of March 1868, when 11 French sailors from the corvette *Dupleix* were killed by samurai of the Tosa clan. This was only one of a number of violent incidents that took place following the emperor's order in 1863 to 'Expel all barbarians'. Predictably, these led to Western reprisals, which only increased anti-foreigner sentiment. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

THE BOSHIN WAR, 1868–1869

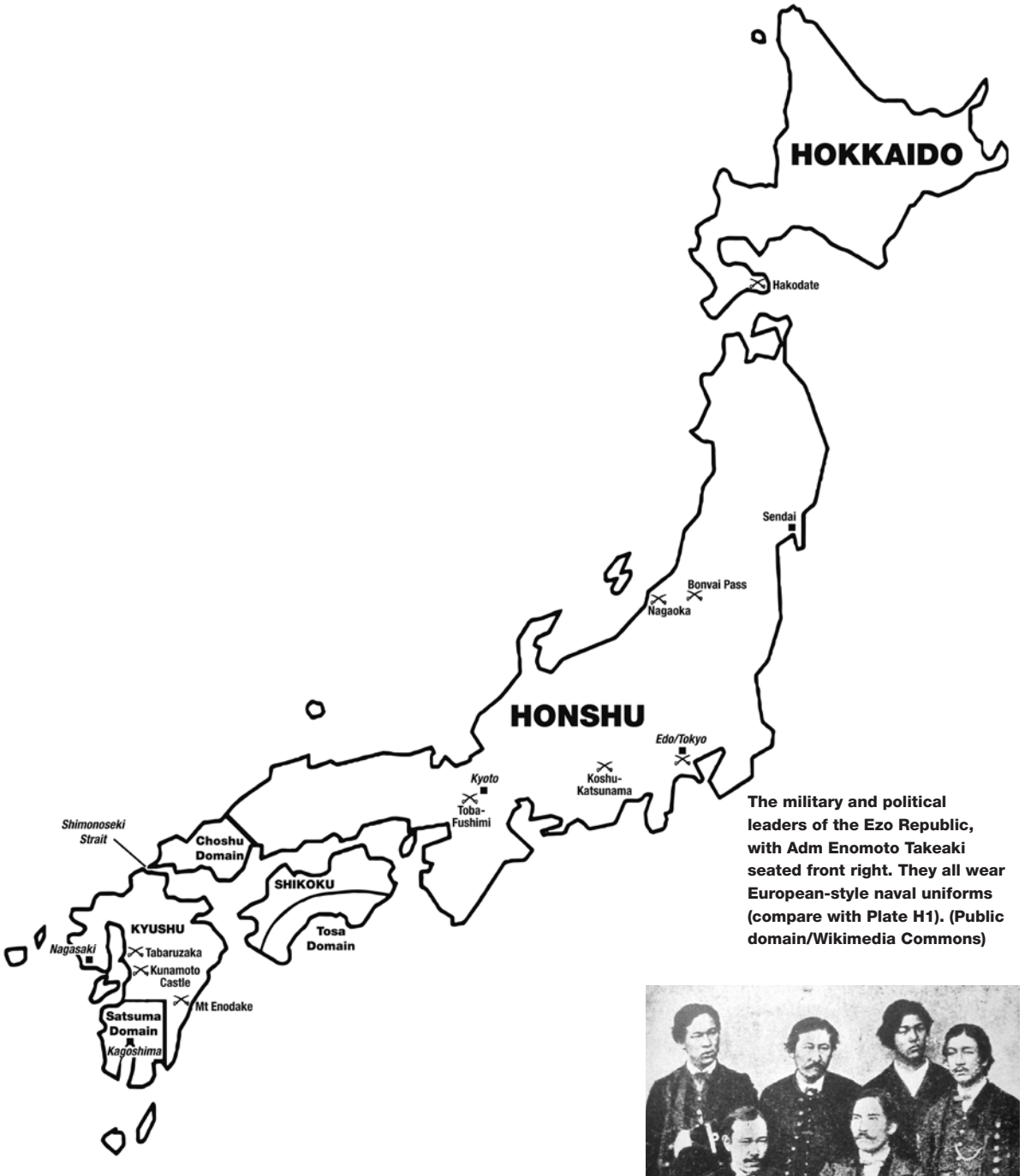
Operations January–July 1868

This civil war, deriving its name from a Japanese term for the year 1868, was fought between an alliance led by the emperor and including the Choshu, Satsuma and Tosa clans, and the feudal contingents of various clans allied to the Tokugawa, plus the *Shinsengumi* police force formed by the shogun in 1863, and the small Westernized corps of Denshutai.

The conflict became inevitable when, on 3 January 1868, Choshu and Satsuma troops captured the Imperial Palace in Kyoto and enabled Emperor Meiji to declare his own restoration to full power. The most radical leaders threatened to abolish the title of *shogun* and to confiscate the lands and goods of the Tokugawa clan, and on 17 January Tokugawa Yoshinobu formally rejected the terms of the Imperial restoration. Satsuma and Choshu samurai promptly burned down the Tokugawa residence in Edo, and in retaliation the shogun's troops then destroyed the Edo palace of the Satsuma leader, Saigo Takamori, killing many 'restorationists'.

The first real battle of the war took place on 27–28 January, after Shogunate forces advanced against Kyoto. It was fought around Toba and Fushimi on the southern approach to the Imperial city, and involved 15,000 Shogunate troops and a 5,000-strong Imperialist army. Despite this disparity in numbers, the Imperialists repulsed their opponents – partly because the Choshu and Satsuma troops had some Armstrong guns and thousands of Minié rifles; but mainly because, on the second day of the battle, several Shogunate contingents changed sides and joined Meiji's forces. (Further defections would follow in early

Soldiers of the Aizu clan disembarking at Fushimi during the Boshin War to support the Shogunate – note (foreground) banners bearing the Tokugawa and Aizu *mon* symbols. This important clan was the only one in central/northern Japan that tried to partly modernize its military forces, but to judge from this engraving the process was far from complete. In the right background, below the Aizu banner, are some infantrymen with shouldered muskets and wearing what may be uniform dress, but the samurai on the left are still dressed traditionally and equipped with polearms. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)



The military and political leaders of the Ezo Republic, with Adm Enomoto Takeaki seated front right. They all wear European-style naval uniforms (compare with Plate H1). (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

February.) However, on 28 January the Shogunate's navy won the small-scale sea battle of Awa against Satsuma warships.

On 7 February, Tokugawa Yoshinobu withdrew to Edo with his still-numerous but discouraged forces. On the diplomatic front his situation was initially quite positive, since the Western powers still treated the Shogunate as the legitimate government. In early March, however, after receiving assurances from the Imperialists, all the foreign nations involved signed a neutrality agreement proposed by the British

Jules Brunet (1838–1911) photographed in 1869 during the defence of the Ezo Republic. Although he disobeyed a direct order due to his determination to remain and fight for the Shogunate, he did not resign his French commission, and still wears his uniform as a captain of Imperial Guard Horse Artillery. His decorations are the cross of the Legion of Honour and the Mexico Medal, awarded for his service there in 1862–64. He and his four companions escaped to the French warship *Coëtlogon* in Hakodate Bay some weeks before the final fall of the Republic on 27 June. The Meiji government demanded his punishment in vain, since he was welcomed in France as a hero and was allowed to resume his career. A veteran of the Franco-Prussian War and the suppression of the Paris Commune, he retired in the rank of general of division. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

ambassador, Sir Harry Parkes; although France continued privately to favour the Shogunate, all the powers undertook not to give military or material support to either of the warring armies. This cynical decision to wait for the winning side to become identifiable did not lessen the general unpopularity of foreigners: Tosa samurai killed 11 French sailors on 8 March, and Parkes himself was attacked in the streets of Kyoto on the 23rd.

The 3,000-strong Satsuma, Choshu and Tosa forces advanced north-eastwards towards Edo in three separate columns, and on 29 March 1868 Imperialists led by the expert and charismatic Satsuma *daimyo* Saigo Takamori virtually destroyed a 300-strong Shogunate force led by Kondo Isami at the battle of Koshu-Katsunama. Kondo escaped the field, but his subsequent capture and execution further lowered morale in Edo, which Saigo Takamori then surrounded. Between May and July 1868 the Imperialist army captured and occupied the city by piecemeal attacks, and the shogun's commander Katsu Kaishu finally surrendered it unconditionally. On 4 July the last defenders of the city, who had rejected the surrender, were crushed in Ueno, the north-eastern quarter. Tokugawa Yoshinobu was stripped of all his titles, and placed under house arrest.

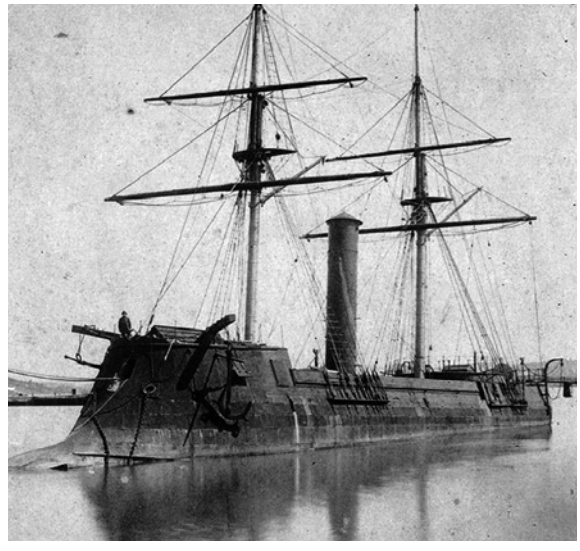
The fall of the Shogunate's capital had immense symbolic impact. On 3 September, Edo was renamed Tokyo ('Eastern capital') and became the new Imperial capital of Japan. The Emperor Meiji transferred his court there from Kyoto, and his new government took over the administrative structures created by the Shogunate. The Imperial regime was persuaded, by both the southern clan leaders and by foreign diplomats, not to exact bloodthirsty revenge on those who had supported the shogun; most of their leaders were imprisoned only briefly, and some would in time rise to high office under the Imperial government.

The Northern Alliance, May–October 1868

Although the commander of the Shogunate's navy, Enomoto Takeaki, had been forced to surrender four of its vessels, he led eight steam warships in an escape to the north in order to continue the fight. Enomoto was accompanied in his retreat by five members of the French military mission, led by Jules Brunet, who chose to continue serving the cause of the *bakufu*. While most of Japan's clans now submitted to the Imperial government, the former regime could still count on the support of some important central and northern domains. In May 1868 various aristocratic families had formed a military league commonly known as the 'Northern Alliance'; this was able to call upon some 50,000 men from the Nagaoka, Aizu, Sendai, Yonezawa, and Shonai domains, but these were mostly feudal fighters with little modern equipment.

The Imperialist army, marching north, first encountered the Nagaoka clan of central Honshu in early May 1868. The Nagaoka leader, Makino Tadakuni, was well prepared to slow down the Imperialist advance; he had purchased two Gatling guns and 2,000 French rifles, and had the services of two 'military advisors' (the Prussian arms dealers Edward and Henry Schnell). Nagaoka resistance was determined and stubborn, and the main stronghold, Nagaoka Castle, changed hands three times between 19 May and its final capture by Imperialist troops on 15 September.

On 6 October 1868 the Northern Alliance tried to stop the Imperialist advance at the strategic Bonari Pass; this formed the most important gateway into the Aizu clan's territory, the heartland of the resistance to Meiji's forces. The pass was held by 700 men including some survivors of the shogun's Shinsengumi police corps, but they were overwhelmed by 2,000 Imperialist soldiers. Meiji's army invaded the Aizu domain, whose main stronghold, Tsuruga (or Aizu, or Wakamatsu) Castle, surrendered on 6 November after a heroically-resisted weeks-long siege. The few still-determined survivors of the *bakufu* field army had already retreated north-east to the port city of Sendai, where Enomoto Takeaki's navy had been based since 26 August, but the fall of Tsuruga Castle rendered Sendai practically indefensible.



The flagship of the new Imperial Navy during the last phase of the Boshin War, the ironclad *Kotetsu* was built in France in 1864 for the Confederate States Navy as the CSS *Stonewall.* Delivered only after the end of the Civil War, it was sold to the Japanese Shogunate by the USA. Arriving in February 1869, once again too late for its intended owners to use it, it was gladly accepted by the new Imperial Navy, and proved decisive in defeating the naval forces of the Ezo Republic. (See also under Plate H1.) (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

On 12 October the navy evacuated the remaining troops to the northernmost island of Hokkaido, where all remaining supporters of the Shogunate now gathered. Northern Hokkaido was still home to some 15,000 of the aboriginal Ainu people, the prehistoric inhabitants of Japan; after centuries of repression they had been confined to this last refuge, but were willing to join in Takeati's resistance to the new Imperial government.

The Republic of Ezo, October 1868–June 1869

Once in Hokkaido, Enomoto Takeaki and Jules Brunet (the leader of the loyal French military advisors) organized a new government and army for an independent 'Republic of Ezo' (the ancient name for Hokkaido). Enomoto Takeaki was elected President of the Republic, with Brunet acting as deputy to the general Otore Keisuke and, in effect, as the tactical commander of the military forces, which he and his French brother-officers did their best to re-organize and train. The basis of their little army were Shogunate troops led by Otore Keisuke, Shinsengumi survivors under Hijikata Toshizo (whom Brunet would praise highly), and guerrillas led by Hitomi Katsutaro; Ezo also had a total of some 2,000 sailors. Thanks to the relative isolation of Hokkaido, they had time to prepare some defences on the southern penisula of Hakodate, but their fighters had few modern weapons.

Enomoto Takeaki tried to obtain some measure of international recognition or support, but without success: by now it was clear that the Meiji Restoration was almost complete, so the Western powers had no interest in supporting a futile lost cause. Significantly for future developments, as early as April 1868 the Emperor Meiji had started to soften his government's stance towards foreigners; he received Western envoys, and increasingly abandoned the fiercely isolationist rhetoric of the Choshu-Satsuma alliance.

On 20 March 1869 an Imperialist naval squadron reached the harbour of Miyako in southern Hokkaido. It included the flagship *Kotetsu*, Japan's first ironclad, and also the former Satsuma warship *Kasuga*, three small corvettes and three transports. Ezo's ex-Shogunate vessels included four steam warships, two sailing warships and two

steam transports, but were completely outclassed by the *Kotetsu*. In an audacious attempt to eliminate the threat, Hijikata Toshizo led a surprise attack by three of the steamships, but one had to turn back in bad weather and the others, *Kaiten* and *Takao,* failed to coordinate their attacks due to engine trouble. An attempt by samurai aboard *Kaiten* to board *Kotetsu* was thwarted by a Gatling gun on the ironclad, and during the subsequent pursuit of the Ezo ships the *Takao*'s captain was forced to beach and scuttle his vessel.

On 9 April 1869, transports landed some 7,000 Imperialist troops near Hakodate. The Ezo Republic's fighters resisted with great courage for several weeks, particularly around the fortress of Benten Daiba, and the star-fort of Goryokaku, which had an 800-man garrison. At sea, the remaining Ezo warships were put out of action one by one during 4–10 May, despite managing to sink one Imperialist vessel. After acquiring naval dominance, the Imperialist squadron was able to give heavy and decisive gunfire support to the troops storming the republican defences. During early June, Brunet and the other French advisors escaped to a French warship anchored in Hakodate Bay. On 27 June 1869, after violent hand-to-hand combat, Goryokaku fort fell to the Imperialist troops, and, having lost about half of his soldiers, Enomoto Takeaki surrendered. After 268 years in power the Tokugawa Shogunate no longer existed; the 122nd emperor was secure on his throne, and a fast-moving new phase in Japan's history had begun.

INTERMISSION, 1869–1877

After the Boshin War, Japan became a centralized state with Tokyo as the capital of an absolute and activist Imperial government. The country was brought under unified control, and from 1871 the domains (clan territories) of the feudal *daimyo* were progressively transformed into a smaller number of 'prefectures', each to be ruled by a governor directly appointed by the emperor. Initially most of the traditional rulers were appointed, but their families' hereditary powers were no longer secure in a hierarchy that demanded absolute obedience to the central government.

The country was opened to foreign cultural penetration; all its institutions underwent a process of modernization along Western lines, and public education was introduced. Experts, advisors, instructors and engineers from all over the developed world were invited in to modernize Japan's institutions and infrastructures. The most significant innovations during this period were a railway system and new armed forces, the latter being reformed by a second French military mission which arrived in May 1872, followed in 1873 by a second British naval mission (the so-called Douglas Mission). Active until 1880, the second French mission created an NCO training school at Toyama, an academy for officer cadets at Ichigaya, a shooting school, an arsenal with French machinery, and a gunpowder factory.

The Westernization imposed by Meiji was not limited to the adoption of new clothes and new technologies, but extended to the most basic elements of Japanese society. Particularly, a wholesale transformation of the status of the samurai warrior caste cost them their traditional

privileges as salaried arms-bearers with authority over the lower classes. They were even forbidden to bear their swords in the cities. The Meiji government intended them to find alternative employment as administrative functionaries, or by accepting modern training to fill officer and NCO ranks in the new conscript army that was formed in 1873. The peasant conscripts would be trained in regular, disciplined units with modern firearms; there would be no place for the selective loyalties of traditional samurai entourages in any future wars.

Unsurprisingly, these expectations proved to be illusory in many cases. The loss of their traditional stipends in 1877 forced most samurai into poverty, while relatively few had any talent for or belief in the new roles intended for them by the Imperial government. They could not mentally abandon, over a period of just a few years, their ancient warrior code of *bushido*, or reconcile themselves to the loss of their proud identity as the defenders of their domains and country – especially so soon after a war which many had fought expressly to protect the ways of life which they had perceived to be already under threat from the Shogunate.

Despite the fact that the Choshu and Satsuma aristocrats who had played a major part in Meiji's restoration enjoyed powerful and lucrative roles in the post-war government, they were certainly not immune to this mood of discontent. At first Saigo Takamori of Satsuma, now probably the most important member of the new ruling class, had tolerated Meiji's reforms, including the change of attitude towards foreigners. There was, after all, some logic in the argument advanced by the Shogunate since 1853, that dealings with the West would produce a richer country with stronger armed forces, thus enabling Japan to obtain much better treaty conditions from foreign governments. However, during 1873 relations between Saigo Takamori and the Imperial regime broke down, after he argued for a military expedition against Korea.

Photo of a 19th-century samurai wearing everyday dress: a combination of *kimono* robe, stiff-shouldered *kataginu* jacket, and wide *hatama* trousers. The characteristic hairstyle was a shaven *sakayaki* tonsure with a rear queue folded forwards to form a topknot. The essential feature of this caste's appearance was the *daisho* – the paired *katana* long and *wakizashi* short swords carried at the left hip ready for instant use. Samurai were the only members of society who were privileged to carry weapons on all occasions, and they might be inclined to draw them to punish an individual of lesser rank who failed to show proper respect. (New York Public Library)

Saigo saw this as a new opportunity for samurai to earn a living with their swords, and to remain in a newly subject protectorate in their traditional role as feudal lords and warriors. When the emperor rejected this backwards-looking proposal, Saigo resigned from all his government positions and returned to his home in Kagoshima. Discontent was spreading, particularly among the southern clans, whose leaders now considered Meiji as a traitor to Japan's traditions and his government as corrupted. Saigo's example was followed by many Satsuma and Choshu ex-samurai who were serving in the new Imperial military forces. In 1874, in order to employ these men in some way, Saigo Takamori established a 'samurai academy' in Kagoshima, and 132 secondary establishments soon appeared all over Satsuma prefecture. The instruction they offered was mostly weapons-training (including with artillery) and battle tactics. By the end of 1876, the Satsuma territory had effectively seceded from Meiji's Japan.

This was a tacit threat to the authority of a government already facing several local revolts. On 22 February 1874 the 'Saga Rebellion' by several hundred unemployed samurai had brought Imperial troops to that

Engraving depicting Westernized samurai, their servants and troops in the service of the Shogunate. The four samurai (centre) are probably officers of the shogun's army; they do not wear uniform, but a mixture of Western-style clothing, while retaining their traditional hairstyle and the *daisho* of swords. An armed servant (far right) wears Japanese dress, and note (third from right) the *nirayama zukin* summer hood, with a badge showing above the flip-up sun visor at the front. The drummer and infantryman (left) have Western-style clothing – note the latter's white-striped sleeve – a musket, crossbelt equipment and a knapsack. (Author's collection)

prefecture, defeating the rebels two days later. The rebel leader, Eto Shimpei, fled to Satsuma, but his surviving samurai held out in Saga Castle until 1 March 1874. Eto Shimpei was captured and executed some weeks later.

From May to December 1874 the new Imperial army and navy were involved in their first overseas campaign: a punitive expedition launched against Taiwan. While formally part of the Chinese Empire, the island was almost entirely inhabited by local aboriginal communities. In December 1871, 54 of the crew of a shipwrecked Japanese vessel were massacred by Paiwan aborigines. When Japan demanded compensation the Chinese government denied responsibility, so in May 1874 some 3,600 Japanese soldiers carried out a punitive expedition, thereafter remaining in occupation until November, after China had paid a large indemnity. This success boosted the military's morale.

In October 1876, new samurai revolts broke out in the Kumamoto, Yamaguchi and Fukuoka prefectures of Kyushu (called the Shinpuren, Hagi and Akizuki rebellions respectively). After a few weeks these were all suppressed, with numbers of rebels committing ritual suicide (*seppuku*), but they were indicative of festering discontent.

In December 1876 the Meiji government sent a force of police to Satsuma prefecture to investigate reports of subversive activities. Captured policemen confessed under torture that they had been sent to assassinate Saigo Takamori (whether truthfully or not is obviously questionable). At this point, hoping to forestall an insurrection, the government sent a warship to Kagoshima with orders to remove all the weapons stockpiled in the arsenal before Saigo's 'academy students' could get hold of them. The vessel's arrival on 30 January 1877 provoked more than 1,000 'students' to launch raids on the arsenal and naval yards, capturing some modern weapons. In February the central government sent the warship *Takao* to Kagoshima carrying a senior negotiator, but after initial talks with the prefecture's governor the ship was attacked by a small flotilla of rebel vessels. These were repulsed with

no great difficulty, but the incident convinced the Meiji government that a proper military expedition had to be sent against Satsuma. Cooler heads hoped to avoid an open clash, and Saigo Takamori himself was reportedly dismayed by these events, but he was eventually persuaded to put himself at the head of the malcontents.

He decided to march on Tokyo, with the aim of persuading the emperor to change his policies. Clearly, he was still locked in the mindset of the 'old ways', and hoped his demonstration would lead to negotiations rather than war to the death. He failed either to communicate his plans to the discontented leaders in other prefectures, or to properly secure his main base of Kagoshima.

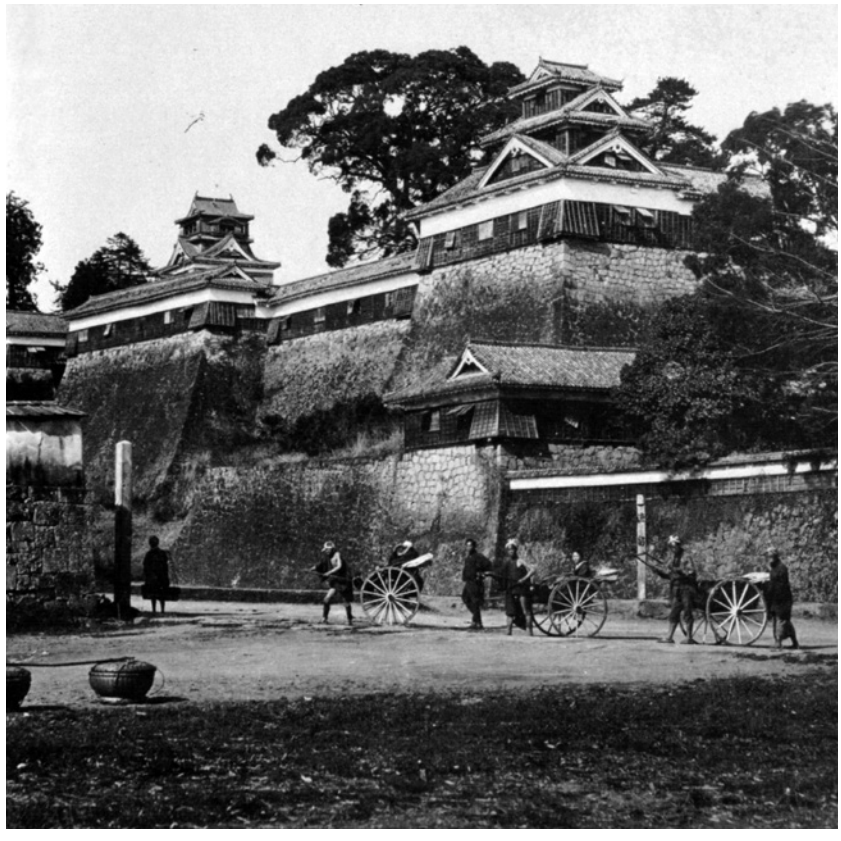
THE SATSUMA REBELLION, 1877

The winter of 1876/77 was the hardest in southern Japan for the past 50 years, and deep snow hampered the advance of Saigo's 15,000-plus troops. His vanguard crossed into Kumamoto prefecture on 14 February, and on the 22nd the main force reached the government stronghold of Kumamoto Castle. This and its outworks were garrisoned by 3,800 regular soldiers and 600 policemen commanded by MajGen Tani Tateke, but since many of the officers and men were Kyushu locals (or even from Kagoshima itself) there was some doubt about their reliability.

To avoid giving his men too much time to think about their situation, Tani had opened fire as early as 19 February. Saigo certainly underestimated the resolve and capabilities of the new peasant conscripts, who put up a much stronger resistance than expected; despite two days of fierce fighting on 22–23 February, with heavy losses on both sides, the Satsuma army failed to take the castle. At this point Saigo ceased his frontal assaults and ordered his men to dig siege trenches. By now his strength had grown to about 20,000, as unemployed samurai came in to join him.

As the days passed the plight of Kumamoto's defenders became increasingly serious: food and ammunition were already reduced to a minimum, due to a recent fire that had destroyed most of the castle's stores. However, the central government was mobilizing all the forces at its disposal to raise the siege, and an Imperial army of 90,000 marched south under Gens Kuroda Kiyotaka and Yamakawa Hiroshi. Saigo Takamori marched to meet it with 15,000 men, leaving 5,000 in his siege lines. A series of actions ensued between 3 and 20 March 1877, in what was called the battle of Tabaruzaka. The first days were characterized by small skirmishes in heavy rain; on 15 March the government troops launched a major assault, which was temporarily repulsed, but on 20 March another general attack forced Saigo's troops to abandon the field. In total, the battle of Tabaruzaka cost each side about 4,000 casualties. Meanwhile, an attempt by Saigo to reach a peace

Fine portrait of Saigo Takamori (1828–77), the leader of the Satsuma Rebellion, in early middle age. Saigo, honoured in modern Japan as 'the Last Samurai', had been the commander of the Imperialist field army during the Boshin War. As head of the Satsuma clan, he had been open to military modernization through foreign contact, and initially supported the reformist programme of the Emperor Meiji. However, the wholesale transformation of Japanese society which Meiji enforced, and particularly the displacement of the samurai caste in favour of an army of peasant conscripts, persuaded Saigo to accept the leadership of the disaffected samurai in 1877. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)



Kumamoto Castle as it looked in 1874, three years before the Satsuma Rebellion. It was probably the strongest of all Japan's provincial castles, and in 1877 it was held by a garrison of some 4,400 men. Although under-provisioned, they held out against the Satsuma rebels for six weeks, buying time for the Imperial government to assemble and deploy a strong field army. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

agreement was rejected; and Imperial warships had landed troops at undefended Kagoshima on 8 March.

The siege of Kumamoto Castle lasted for three more weeks, but on the night of 8 April a small picked force from the garrison made a sortie, opening a gap in the Satsuma lines which enabled badly needed supplies to reach the castle. On 12 April the main Imperial army finally arrived, forcing the greatly outnumbered Satsuma besiegers to withdraw southwards. The survivors of the garrison were hailed as heroes, while this defeat had a deep impact on the morale of the rebels. Initially they took up positions at Hitoyoshi and waited for the arrival of the enemy, but both sides more or less suspended operations for several weeks, during which both reorganized their supply lines and received some reinforcements.

Late in May, Saigo crossed the peninsula south-eastwards to Miyazaki, dropping off small groups of chosen samurai in the central hills to slow down the Imperial advance by guerrilla activity. The government landed forces at several points on both coasts, and although the rebels fought their way free of pincer movements they were now being driven around the country without any clear operational purpose. Increasing numbers of them deserted, and many weapons, including all of Saigo's artillery, were abandoned.

By 17 August 1877 the Satsuma army, driven northwards again, had only some 3,000 weary and badly equipped men left when they decided to stop and make a stand on the slopes of Mount Enodake. Surrounded by about seven times as many Imperial troops, Saigo's men had little choice but to fight to the end and die with honour. When they were

overrun on 19 August, many rebels surrendered or committed suicide. Saigo Takamori escaped from the field and force-marched with about 500 survivors for Kagoshima, which they reached on 1 September, occupying Shiromaya hill overlooking the city from the north-east. There they were surrounded by some 30,000 soldiers and marines under Gen Yamagata Aritomo and Adm Kawamura Sumiyoshi, who took the time to construct encircling field works to prevent another escape, while five warships in Kagoshima harbour bombarded the rebel position.

After dawn on 24 September 1877, Gen Yamagata launched a frontal assault against what remained of the Satsuma positions, and soon only about 40 rebels were left standing. Saigo Takamori fought until the end; after being shot and severely wounded, he committed *seppuku* with the aid of one of his surviving followers. The last handful of rebels then charged the Imperial troops, to die fighting. Revered as a tragic hero, Saigo Takamori would be posthumously pardoned by the Emperor Meiji in 1889.

Two samurai of the Meiji Restoration period in full traditional equipment as favoured by the Satsuma rebels, its design echoing a thousand-year-old military culture of close combat with bladed weapons. The arrival of modern firearms handled *en masse* by formations of conscripts rendered it useless by the 1870s, and signalled the final displacement of the military caste who wore it. (New York Public Library)

JAPANESE FORCES 1840–1868

The feudal domains

Until 1840 Japanese military organization continued to be basically that of the 17th century; it retained many common feudal elements, though with significant regional variations.

Politically Japan was divided into more than 250 'domains' or semi-independent feudal estates, each ruled by the family of a *daimyo* warlord. Much of the country, including most cities, was under the direct control of the Tokugawa clan or its close allies. Domains varied greatly in size, but all had to provide military contingents to the shogun in time of war. Each daimyo's feudal militia was composed primarily of professional warriors, the legendary *samurai;* each of these served the daimyo in exchange for a hereditary land fief, whose produce provided him with a living, and from which he could raise some peasant foot-soldiers at need – essentially like medieval knights in Europe. The quotas of fighters required from each domain in wartime, calculated from its taxable productive capacity (fundamentally, its rice yield), were fixed in 1649 and remained practically unchanged until 1862.

The warlords were divided between two main categories: *fudai,* who had already been Tokugawa vassals before Sekigahara in 1600; and *tozama*, who had been forced to submit thereafter. The former were extremely loyal to the Shogunate and enjoyed little political autonomy, while the latter were generally both wealthier and also touchier about their rights. The Shogunate employed a complex system of checks and balances in order to maintain strict control: these included an intelligent territorial distribution of loyal *fudai* lords among the more self-willed *tozama,* and a strict prohibition on importing foreign weapons. Militarily, the samurai maintained by the feudal lords were divided into wealthier *seishi*, who served as horsemen, and poorer *kashi*, who fought on foot. Apart from those who were called up by their daimyos in time of war, a certain number of each category also served the Shogunate directly in peacetime, as castle garrisons and city guards.

During the basically peaceful late 17th and 18th centuries military duties were limited to occasional 'police' expeditions to crush local peasant revolts, and the samurai class's martial spirit declined. Some started to perform administrative duties for their lords, in return for a fixed salary rather than a land grant, and in time these posts also became hereditary. Enjoying privileges such as tax exemptions, this increasingly parasitic group of functionaries, whose priority was the defence of its own privileges and those of the high aristocracy, came to play a prominent role in Japanese society.

Nevertheless, by the early 19th century the fortunes of the provincial samurai caste had seriously declined. Inflation had eroded the incomes derived from both fiefs and salaries, which had remained unchanged since the mid-17th century, and by 1840 most of the *kashi* were poorer even than peasants. The code of *bushido* forbade samurai from earning a living other than by their swords, and poverty led to the emergence of a whole new class of samurai. These *ronin* were incomeless and masterless warriors who travelled around Japan in search of employment, but who frequently resorted to crime in order to survive.

MODERNIZATION

The Shogunate's army

The first 'Westernized' military unit in Japan was created in 1840 at his own expense by Takashima Shunan, a wealthy official working in Nagasaki

The transition: Shogunate infantry under training at the Kobusho Academy established by Takashima Shunan in 1856 (see also Plate A2). All wear Japanese clothing, many with the cadets' distinctive *toppai zukin* winter hood, and carry a *katana* at the hip, but all are equipped with percussion muskets and a single crossbelt supporting cartridge and cap pouches. (Author's collection)

city in western Kyushu. Familiar with the nearby Dutch trading community on Deshima, he gradually bought muskets and artillery pieces to equip a 300-strong experimental volunteer corps of two infantry companies and an artillery battery, which was trained using the Dutch language. The majority of them came from the domains of Choshu and Satsuma.

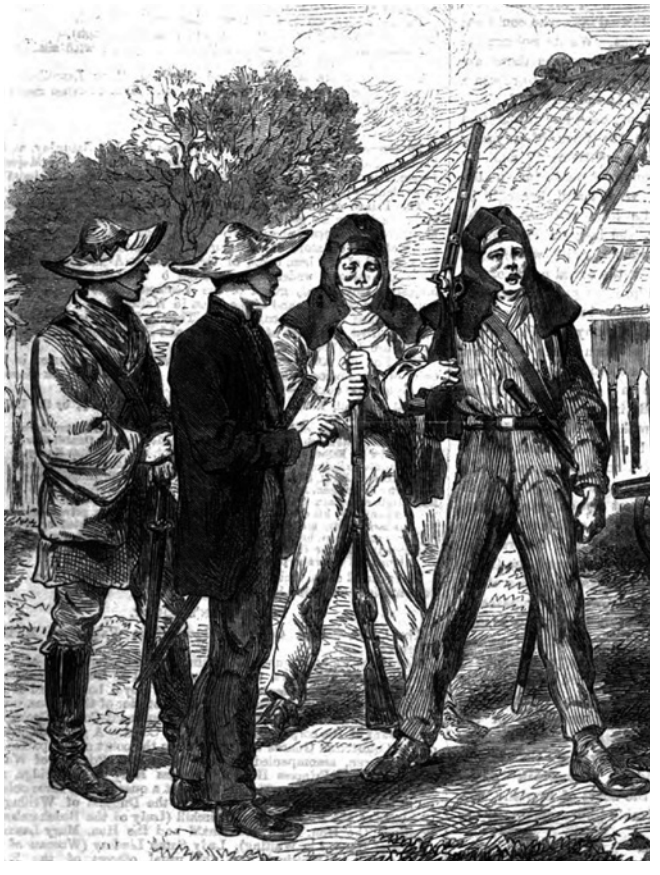
In June 1841 Takashima Shunan was summoned to Edo with 125 of his 'cadets' to demonstrate their capabilities to government officials. Impressed, the *bakufu* decided to buy all Takashima's Dutch weapons, and commissioned him to establish a military school. In 1842, however, reactionary members of the regime gained the upper hand; Takashima's initiative was pronounced treasonable, and he was imprisoned for four years. The situation changed radically in 1853 with the arrival of Perry's squadron. Now desperate to modernize its antiquated forces, the *bakufu* retrospectively pardoned Takashima Shunan and appointed him as the chief instructor of the Shogunate's army. In 1855 the Dutch were permitted to establish a military and naval training college at Nagasaki with 20 instructors, and the following year Takashima opened the new Kobusho Academy for instruction in modern firearms and Western tactics. Over the same period factories and foundries for the production of firearms were established in cities including Edo and Nagasaki.

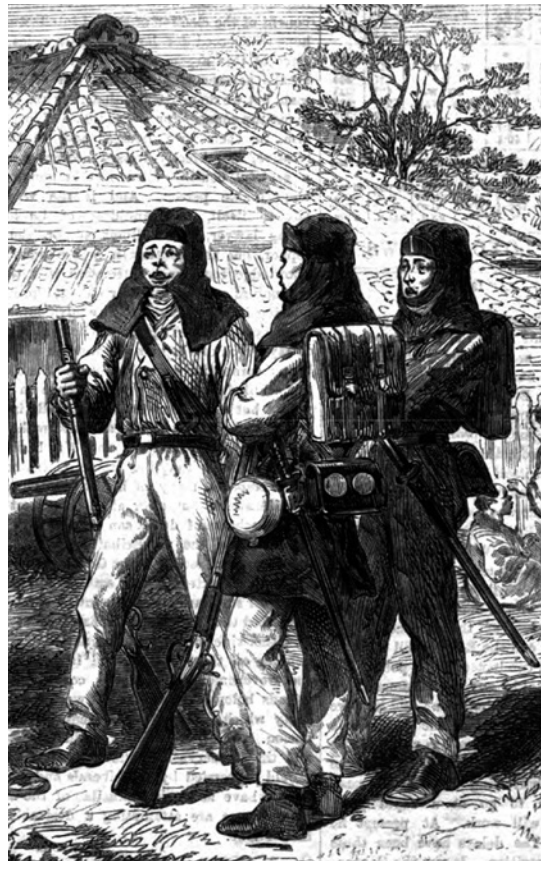
The *Sampeitai*

Serious economic problems delayed the modernization of the Shogunate's army after 1856, when priority was given to strengthening coastal defences and buying steam warships. Only in 1862 did samurai graduates of the Nagasaki or Kobusho academies produce a plan for comprehensive reorganization of the land forces. A permanent, standing army was to be formed with samurai from all over Japan, being directly recruited in the territories under the shogun's personal control and provided by regional domains under their military obligations. This force was variously known as the *Sampeitai* or the *Shinei Jobigun,* and was supposed to number 13,625 men: 8,300 infantry (2,000 of them equipped with modern firearms); 1,068 cavalry (900 with modern firearms), 2,845 artillerymen (800 serving 48x 8-pounder field guns, and 2,045 with 52x 16-pdr heavy guns), all led by 1,406 officers.

The soldiers were to be half-and-half *seishi* upper-class samurai and poorer *kashi,* aged between 17 and 45 years and serving for a period of five years. Infantry battalions of 600 men comprised five companies of 120, each with three 40-strong platoons made up of four 10-man squads. The 12 cavalry squadrons were each roughly 100 strong, and the 50 artillery batteries 50 strong. The quotas of soldiers that each warlord had previously been obliged to send were reduced, and for the first time daimyos might provide payments in cash or rice in place of recruits (the Shogunate needed money to buy firearms, and rice to feed its new army). The newly Westernized troops of Choshu (see 'South-western forces', below) were not part of the Sampeitai's structure, but Satsuma – at least on paper – was the most important contributor, having to provide men for 8 infantry battalions, 1 cavalry squadron and 4 artillery batteries.

From the beginning, the formation of the new Sampeitai was hampered by many difficulties. The shogun's direct domains responded obediently enough, but elsewhere many warlords resisted buying modern weapons, the new organization and tactics required to make use of them,





Two halves of an engraving showing Shogunate officers and infantry of the Boshin War period wearing Westernized civilian clothing with Japanese headgear: for the former, the *nirayama gasa* battle-hat (left), and for the latter the *nirayama zukin* summertime hood. The battle-hat, of reduced proportions and with a brim that could be folded down at the sides to accommodate modern weapons drill, was designed by one of Takashima Shunan's disciples, Egawa Tanan. It soon became popular, being adopted under the Shogunate's 1863 dress regulations (see Plate B1), and by the Choshu clan. Note (right) the percussion musket and European-style field equipment, including a canteen, a cartridge pouch with local insignia, and a knapsack, but still including the *katana* sword. (Author's collection)

and the burden of providing contingents for regular service rather than in wartime only. Despite the grant of funds to help the feudal lords buy firearms, the Sampeitai managed to raise only half its planned manpower. Consequently, in 1863 the Shogunate decided to make up the numbers by recruiting peasant commoners in addition. Under a modified plan adopted in February 1865, the Sampeitai was to comprise 12 numbered 800-man infantry battalions (*hohei*) totalling 9,600 men, just 2 cavalry squadrons with 264 men, and 6 artillery batteries totalling 1,380 men. Peasant enlistment brought increasing numbers of recruits, but the revised structure was still never realized: by the beginning of 1867 there were only 5,900 infantrymen in 7 battalions, whose establishments varied between 600 and 1,000 soldiers.

Measures taken to augment these forces included the creation in 1866 of 5 additional infantry battalions (*yugekitai*) scraped together from a number of separate feudal contingents, but these seem to have been short of modern equipment and training. Another measure which achieved only disappointing results was to try to force feudal fighters to adopt modern firearms by suspending the pay of samurai who continued to use traditional weapons.

The Shogunate also disbanded the traditional corps of city and legation guards from across Japan and absorbed their components into the central army. The most important of these, the *mimawari-gumi* magisterial guards in Edo, were converted into three 500-strong infantry battalions. The first, made up of samurai of high social rank, became

known as the Battalion of Legation Guards (*bette gumi*), and continued to perform police duties in Edo; the other two lower-class units were named *hohei gumi*, and employed as regular infantry. Since samurai were very class-conscious, the shogun also tried briefly to create new categories of units from particular social groups. The highest-ranking samurai were assembled in units termed *kumiai jutai,* lesser but still high-ranking men into *okuzume jutai*, fighters of middle rank into *yugeitai*, their inferiors into *jutai,* and the very humblest into *sappei,* which were static garrison/coastal artillery corps.

The disastrous defeat of the 'Second Choshu Expedition' in 1866 revealed the weaknesses of the very heterogeneous Shogunate army, and it was in hope of achieving necessary reforms quickly that late that year the *bakufu* government invited the first military mission from France.

South-western forces

After China's crushing defeat by Britain in the First Opium War (1840), some Japanese warlords recognized the need for military modernization, and the most ambitious and innovative in this regard were those in Choshu and, to a lesser extent, Satsuma. These *tozama* domains had always maintained some commercial relations with China thanks to their geographical position, and, as the wealthiest clans in Japan, they could afford to buy foreign weapons.

One feature that had long distinguished Choshu and Satsuma samurai from those of other regions was that many were of a socially

Photo of a Shogunate officer and soldiers in dark-coloured, European-style clothing. Under magnification the left-hand men can be seen to wear the hairstyle adopted by students at the Kobusho Academy, but that alone is not a sufficient identification, since it became more widely popular in Japan. (Author's collection)

inferior rustic class known as *goshi,* who had risen from peasant farming or merchant backgrounds – social progress that was not permitted in other areas of Japan. Others were descended from samurai who had been deprived of their lands after defeat by the Tokugawa in 1600. Under the 1649 organization, in time of war Choshu had to provide 6,000 samurai to the shogun, and Satsuma 14,000. By 1840, however, these two domains boasted many more samurai than officially required: 11,000 in Choshu, and 25,000 in Satsuma. While the Shogunate took the steps described above to modernize their forces, the south-western clans did more or less the same, but on an autonomous basis.

A factory for modern firearms was established in the Satsuma capital of Kagoshima as early as 1854, soon followed by a cannon foundry and three ammunition plants. The 'Anglo-Satsuma War' in 1863 emphasized the need to reorganize and re-train local forces: there was not much point in buying or producing modern firearms unless there were soldiers capable of using them effectively, so the daimyo of Satsuma employed an officer and several retired NCOs from France.

During these crucial years both Choshu and Satsuma started to employ large numbers of peasants in their military forces: for the first time in centuries, commoners were permitted to bear arms and fight side-by-side with the professional samurai. Some *noheitai* part-time peasant militias had existed in the south-west since the mid-1850s, of which the first had been the *Mimpei* coastguard organized by the Tosa clan of Shikoku in 1854. Like the similar *Seishintai* created by the Ashigaka clan in 1865, this numbered only a few hundred men in independent companies. While the modernized soldiers in Satsuma would not be organized above company level, in Choshu the most impressive force of commoners in Japan was embodied – and peasants were much more receptive of modern weapons than the samurai.

In 1863 Takasugi Shinsaku, a Choshu military disciple of the Dutch, created the *Kiheitai* ('extraordinary corps'), mostly armed with imported

Detail from an original watercolour by the French instructor Jules Brunet, showing Shogunate soldiers in a temporary encampment. They wear a motley mixture of Japanese and Westernized clothing; note (far left) one man wearing the *nirayama gasa,* but several others with the old broader *jingasa.* The uniform designed for their *Denshutai* corps by the French military mission was not widely distributed, so most Shogunate troops presented an irregular appearance. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

muskets. Initially 300 strong, it was remarkable in that samurai, townsmen and rural peasants served together regardless of class distinctions, and were officered by *goshi* and *ronin* samurai of modest social rank. All members of the unit received higher pay than usual, but had to submit to strict military discipline and Western-style training. Its success convinced the Choshu warlord to form a second, and then a third company of Kiheitai.

The greatly resented attacks by foreign warships brought in hundreds of volunteers for other modernized units, either sponsored by local government or organized by individual charismatic samurai. Collectively known as *shotai* ('auxiliary militia'), these initially included the following: the *Giyutai, Rikishitai* and *Shugitai* (each of 50 men); the *Hachimantai* (100 strong), *Yochotai* (230), and *Yugekitai* (500 men). By the end of 1864 there were some 60 different *shotai* corps in Choshu, and from 1865 most of these 'private' units were gradually absorbed into the domain's central forces, and fully re-equipped with modern firearms.

Shogunate infantrymen wearing the M1863 uniform (compare with Plate B1). They might display on their battle-hats and sleeves either one or three white bands. For the uniform of their later *Denshutai*, the French instructors standardized on a single stripe on the outsides of the sleeves and trouser legs (see Plate B2). (New York Public Library)

ARMIES OF THE BOSHIN WAR

THE SHOGUNATE

The *Denshutai*

The situation that the French mission found upon their arrival in 1867 was desperate, since the government's efforts to transform the feudal provincial militias into at least 'semi-regular' troops had achieved very little. The army comprised a bewildering variety of different units, suffered from severe deficiencies of training and discipline, and was still mostly equipped with antiquated weapons.

Given their limited resources, the French instructors started by creating a 'new model' unit from zero – a brand-new elite force called the *Denshutai,* intended to serve as an exemplar for the rest of the army. Although only about 900 strong, this was to include elements from all three arms: two 400-strong infantry battalions (formed with the poorest class of samurai from the disbanded *sappei* corps), plus small numbers of cavalry and artillery. The Denshutai were trained in three different schools for infantry, cavalry and artillery, and some even received engineer instruction. One of the innovations they introduced was to train lightly-equipped horsemen with lances and modern carbines. In addition to their expertise, the French instructors brought to Japan 20 Arabian horses, and some modern weapons (3,000 M1866 Chassepot rifles, 6 field guns and 6 mountain guns).

The French mission planned that after completing their training the Denshutai should be dispersed as instructors for the rest of the army. As already noted, however, the outbreak of the Boshin War brought this programme to a very premature halt; in 1868 members of the Denshutai were sent to the front as ordinary soldiers, and their instructors were ordered to return to France.

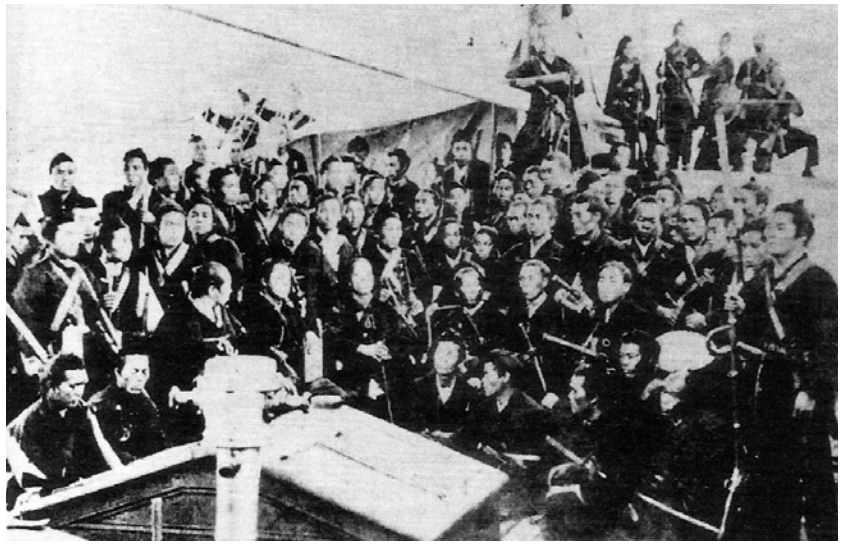


Photo of Shogunate soldiers being transported to Hokkaido by sea, October 1868, in order to continue the resistance against the Imperialist army. Most of them wear dark-blue or black Westernized clothing with belt equipment, and are armed with percussion muskets; all, however, still carry the samurai's long and short swords. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

Police forces

The Shogunate could also call upon a police force, the *Shinsengumi* ('new selected group'), which had been organized in 1863. Mostly formed with ultra-loyal samurai coming from the 'sword schools' of Edo, plus a few trusted *ronin*, their main task was protecting the Shogunate's officials in the hostile Imperial capital of Kyoto. Originally numbering just 106 volunteers, the Shinsengumi played an important role during the 'Kimmon incident' of 1864. It was only thanks to them that the emperor was not 'kidnapped' by Choshu rebels and that Kyoto was not completely burned down, and thereafter the corps was increased to 302 members.

On the outbreak of the Boshin War the Shinsengumi joined the Shogunate Army. They were formally disbanded after suffering heavy losses at the battle of Toba-Fushimi, but some chose to form a new *Koyo Chinbutai* ('pacification corps') to act as a sort of military police. After the disastrous battle of Bonari Pass the few survivors enlisted as individual volunteers to serve the Ezo Republic. Most of the samurai who tried to board the Imperial ironclad *Kotetsu* in the face of Gatling-gun fire during the battle of Miyako Bay were former members of the Koyo Chinbutai.

Aizu forces

The main supporter of the Shogunate during the Boshin War, the Aizu clan – like others in northern Honshu – was quite slow to modernize, but by the outbreak of the war they too had developed some innovations.

Aizu samurai were divided into four categories by age, each named after one of four mythological creatures related to Chinese constellations. The young sons of samurai, aged 16–17, were known as *Byakkotai* ('White Tigers'). Although they were intended to be deployed only in dire emergency, during the Boshin War these 300 boys fought with great courage in the defence of castles, and many committed *seppuku* after their defeat. The prime of the samurai, aged 18–35, were called *Suzakutai* ('Vermillion Birds'), and provided the main combat force, while the most experienced *Seiryutai* ('Azure Dragons'), aged 35–49, provided a garrison and border-patrol force. Finally, veterans aged 50 and above

(continued on page 33)

'WESTERNIZED' TROOPS, 1840s–60s
1: Takashima Shunan's corps, 1841
2: Cadet, Kobusho Academy, 1856
3: Guardsman, Legation Guards Bn, 1866

SHOGUNATE ARMY, 1860s
1: Infantryman, *Sampeitai,* 1866
2: Infantryman, *Denshutai,* 1867
3: Cavalryman, *Denshutai,* 1867

THE BOSHIN WAR, 1868–69
1: *Samurai* of *Shinsengumi;* Shogunate army, 1869
2: Satsuma infantryman; Imperialist Army, 1868
3: Choshu infantry officer; Imperialist Army, 1868–69

C

THE SATSUMA REBELLION, 1877
1: High-ranking *samurai*, rebel army
2: *Samurai* infantryman, rebel army
3: Patrolman of *Battoh-Tai*, Imperial Army

***SHIMPEI* IMPERIAL GUARD, 1871–73**
1: Private 1st class, Infantry
2: Private 1st class, Cavalry
3: Private 2nd class, Artillery

IMPERIAL ARMY, 1874–77

1: Staff Sgt, Imperial Guard infantry
2: Private 1st class, Infantry
3: Lt, Artillery, summer service dress

IMPERIAL ARMY, & AINU, 1870s
1: Private 2nd class, Imperial Guard Cavalry, 1874
2: Private 2nd class, Line Cavalry, 1874
3: Ainu chieftain, 1877

SHOGUNATE & IMPERIAL NAVIES, 1850s–70s
1: Captain, Shogunate Navy, 1868
2: Sailor, Nagasaki Naval School, 1855
3: NCO, Imperial Marine Corps, 1873–78

formed the *Genbutai* ('Black Turtles'), who patrolled the capital city of Aizu and formed a final strategic reserve.

Each of the categories was divided into three levels according to social rank, and the Vermillion Birds, Azure Dragons and Black Turtles were further sub-divided into three even more subtle gradations. These nine sub-categories were visibly identified by wearing coloured items, respectively: (senior level), in descending order, black, dark-blue, or blue belts; (medium level), brown, yellow-green, or pale-yellow belts; (junior level), black, brown, or light-yellow collars.

The Japanese and French officers of the Ezo Republic, 1869; Brunet is seated second from left, and behind stand three of the other four Frenchmen who followed him to Hokkaido. The Japanese officers also wear Western-style uniform, complete with gold-laced kepis and Austrian sleeve-knots, and hold European sabres. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

Hokkaido, 1869

The five French instructors who decided to remain in Japan and fight together with their former students of the Denshutai were led by Capt Jules Brunet, who also assumed a leadership function within the remnant of the Shogunate forces which retreated to Hokkaido. These numbered only some 3,000, including sailors of the Shogunate Navy and former Denshutai. Brunet divided them into four small infantry 'brigades', each 750 strong and commanded by one of the other four French officers who had accompanied him (named Fortant, Marlin, Cazeneuve and Bouffier). Each was tactically divided into two 'half-brigades' commanded by Japanese former members of the Denshutai. Brunet and his four companions were also joined by two officers of the French Navy, who resigned from their posts in order to support the Ezo Republic. They apparently played a prominent part in the building of new military defences in southern Hokkaido, and in the organization of the Ezo Navy. Despite their efforts, the Frenchmen could do very little to prevent the final fall of the Republic.

IMPERIALIST FORCES

As early as April 1868 the Emperor Meiji had started to take the first steps towards the formation of a new Imperial army. Each of the warlords loyal to the Imperialist cause was ordered to provide 60 soldiers for each 10,000 *koku* produced in his domain. (The *koku*, about 150kg, was the standard unit for measuring rice, corresponding to the amount needed to feed one man for one year.) Of these 60-man drafts, 10 were to be sent to the capital for service under the central government, and 50 were to act as garrison troops in their own domain.

Choshu forces

By the time a comprehensive regularization of the volunteer movement was carried out in mid-1866, there were more than 150 different *shotai* corps in the Choshu domain – though of widely varying strength, and often of only brief existence. Their regularization contributed to a structure of 36 infantry battalions each 400 strong, composed of ten 40-man companies. With a paper strength of 14,400, Choshu's new Westernized military force would form the hard core of the Imperialist

army that fought the Boshin War, before being officially absorbed into the new Imperial Japanese Army during 1869.

ARMIES OF THE SATSUMA REBELLION

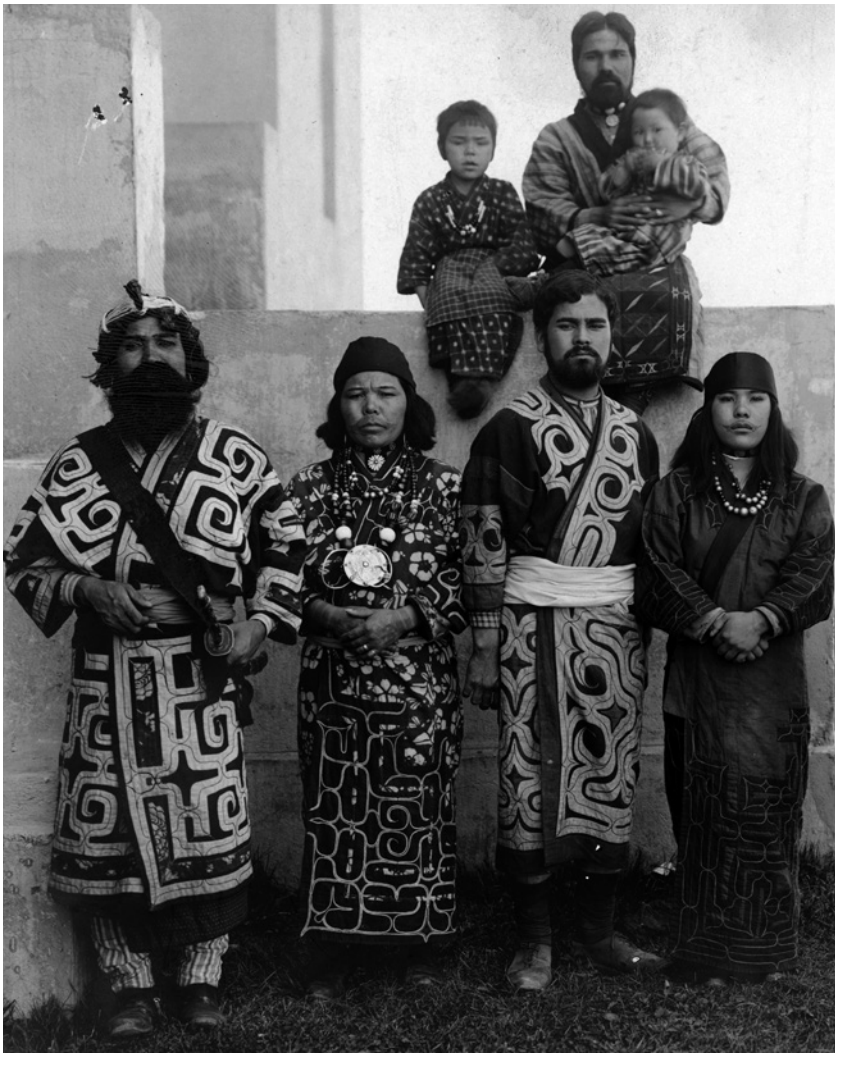
The Imperial Army

After victory in the Boshin War the Emperor Meiji's government had faced a difficult military situation: the few units 'modernized' by the Shogunate no longer existed, so Japan had no national army. Those under arms were a mixture of feudal contingents (most of which had recently been defeated), and the partly Westernized troops of Choshu and Satsuma. With the abolition of the domains and formation of prefectures (see above, 'Intermission'), this situation was no longer sustainable.

During the last months of 1869, several of the smaller domains who had not previously shown interest in modernization started to reform their small 'private' armies. For example, the Kii clan re-organized its forces with the assistance of a Prussian NCO, and purchased 4,800 Dreyse rifles. By 1870 this clan could deploy 8 infantry battalions each of 600 men, one 'regiment' of cavalry with 150 horsemen, two batteries of mountain artillery and a small pioneer corps.

In February 1870 an Imperial decree assembled the 60 men previously provided by each domain for each 10,000 *koku* of its resources into an

Detail from an artistic impression of the battle of Hakodate in June 1869, the last action of the Boshin War. From left, the last few samurai defenders of the Ezo Republic launch a desperate counterattack against Imperialist soldiers disembarked by the naval squadron in the background. Several of the Imperialists are depicted in European-style uniforms, though some of them (left foreground, right background) also apparently wear the *guma* yak-hair wig. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)



The most surprising allies of the Ezo Republic were the Ainu people of northern Hokkaido. This is a detail from a group photo taken at the beginning of the 20th century, by which time Japanese colonization and interbreeding had almost destroyed their culture. Note the distinctive embroidered decoration of their clothes; such motifs were also reproduced on the body armour traditionally used by their leaders (compare with Plate G3). Being useless against modern firearms, such corselets were largely abandoned during the 1860s–70s. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

infantry platoon, and each two platoons formed a 120-man company. At this stage most Imperial soldiers were still samurai, but peasants would become increasingly numerous. That October, another decree ordered all domains to adopt the French military system which the Shogunate had attempted to introduce in 1867.

In November 1870 the government made a first attempt to introduce conscription, albeit only on an experimental basis and in just five prefectures located around Kyoto (Izumi, Kawachu, Settsur, Tamashiro and Yamato). These prefectures were each required to send five soldiers for each 10,000 *koku*, to serve for four years. This pilot scheme failed: most of the peasants refused to serve in the new army, and the planned numbers of recruits were never reached.

In 1871 all the clan forces that still followed feudal models were disbanded, while those that had already begun to modernize were retained as the nucleus for the new Imperial Army. Since French military prestige was still intact in Japan despite defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the Meiji government invited a second French military mission in 1872 (a third would arrive in 1884). The Japanese reformists were

convinced that the only way to eradicate feudalism from the army was to introduce universal conscription, which was finally decreed in 1873. With decisive French help, former Choshu officers played a prominent part in this foundational phase of the new army. Since 1868 some officers of Meiji's army had already started their studies at a new military academy created during that year in Kyoto; in 1871 this was enlarged and transferred to the new capital of Tokyo, and before the arrival of the French mission it was already training future officers according to contemporary French doctrines.

The new French mission that arrived in May 1872 was composed of ten officers, 14 NCOs and three other specialists. Initially they were supposed to remain in Japan for just three years, but in the end they continued to instruct the cadres of the new Imperial Army until 1880. They created an NCO training school at Toyama in 1873, and an academy for cadet officers at Ichigaya in 1875: these provided the models for several equivalent schools established across the country with Japanese instructors. Although practically all the officers and NCOs were samurai, the French were able to transform them into more-or-less 'Western'-style soldiers; NCOs were chosen by officers and thus were usually former samurai of lower social rank. Under the system of universal conscription introduced in 1873, the richest young aristocrats could avoid military service in return for a substantial payment, but rarely took this option: in the course of time, most former samurai came to consider military service as an honour.

In January 1873 the Meiji government established the first conscription law, by which military service was made compulsory for able-bodied males aged 20–40, selected by drawing lots. The period of service with the Active Army (*Jobigun*) was three years, after which each soldier remained in the First Reserve (*Yobigun*) for another two years, and in the Second Reserve (*Kobigun*) for a final two. While on the rolls of the Yobigun he had to report for annual training; once he passed to the Kobigun he was

Imperialist samurai from the Satsuma clan during the early phases of the Boshin War; only those at rear right are wearing Western-style dark-blue or black clothing. Note at far right, on the man's left sleeve, a hanging patterned red ribbon, and a white patch with black characters or symbols. The former was the main field sign adopted by the Imperialists during this war, while the latter, identifying a particular clan, was typical of both sides. It was worn on the left sleeve of European-style jackets, or on the left breast of traditional clothing. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

exempt from service except in national emergencies. By contrast, the NCOs served for the whole seven years in the Jobigun and did not pass into the Reserve. All those able-bodied men who were not chosen for active military service had to remain until their 40th year in a militia termed the *Kokumingun*, which was liable to be called up only in emergencies, after both the First and Second Reserve had been mobilized.

In 1873 the territory of Japan was divided into six military districts, with the exception of Hokkaido (see below): Tokyo, Sendai, Nagoya, Osaka, Hiroshima and Kumamoto. Each military district was in turn divided into two sub-districts. The whole army comprised 14 regiments of infantry, 2 squadrons of cavalry, 18 batteries of field and mountain artillery, 9 companies of garrison artillery, 10 companies of engineers, and 6 companies of train (transport). In time of war, the army was to muster 31,680 men, with the addition of the First Reserve bringing strength up to 46,350 soldiers. In peacetime each infantry regiment totalled 2,320 men in three 768-strong battalions, each with four companies of 192 men. Wartime regimental establishment was 3,280, with three 1,088-strong battalions and 272-man companies.

Japanese print showing a standard-bearer and an officer of the Imperial Army during the Satsuma Rebellion. They are both wearing the new M1873/74 uniform, which incorporated minor modifications to the previous dress regulations of 1870 (see commentaries to Plates F and G). Both figures wear the white headgear, and the officer the white trousers, of summer dress, with otherwise blue uniforms. The officer wears a patrol jacket – compare with Plate F3. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

The underdeveloped northernmost island of Hokkaido was not part of any military district. In order to defend it from the potential threat of Russian expansionism, and to keep an eye on the local Ainu communities, a Hokkaido Militia was created in 1874. This *tonden nohei* was formed from ex-samurai who were encouraged by land grants to settle in Hokkaido after the Boshin War. All able-bodied male settlers aged 18 to 35 had to serve in this battalion of roughly 500 men, who acted as provincial police in peacetime and as soldiers in time of war. The Hokkaido Militia remained in existence until 1903.

Despite the historic tradition of horsemanship among the samurai, the Meiji government had great difficulty in forming effective cavalry units, for lack of horses strong enough for modern military service, which required keeping them saddled and in the field for longer periods. In 1873 the Imperial Army had only two cavalry squadrons: one was a Guard unit, while the other was garrisoned in Tokyo. A third squadron, stationed in Sendai, was raised some time later. Each squadron comprised two troops, each of two sections; squadron establishment was 120 in peacetime and 150 in wartime, and the two 'line' squadrons were generally assembled to act as a single unit.

The 18 artillery batteries were initially assembled in pairs to form 9 battalions – 6 with mountain guns and 3 with field pieces. Each battery comprised two 3-gun sections, and had a peacetime establishment of 120 gunners, rising in wartime to 130 in field and 160 in mountain batteries. The 9 companies of garrison/coastal defence artillery each had 80 gunners in peacetime and 100 in wartime. A single company of engineers had been organized by the first French mission as early as 1867, but the Engineer Corps was formally established as a branch of service only in 1872. The 10 companies of engineers organized from 1873 each

Detail from contemporary drawing of Saigo Takamori (seated centre) and his samurai commanders, who are all wearing armour and carrying traditional weapons. Although he too carries a *katana*, only Saigo wears a Westernized uniform – a jacket with frontal frogging and cuff rank rings, white breeches and spurred, high-fronted riding boots. This choice of clothing may have been a gesture to indicate that he was not seeking to depose Meiji, but only to persuade him to change his policies. Although shown as a greybeard, Saigo was only 49 at this date. (Public domain/ Wikimedia Commons)

had a peacetime officer and NCO establishment of 120, which was initially increased by adding 30 rankers only in wartime, but later incorporated rankers on a permanent basis. Apparently, during the Satsuma Rebellion, 3 additional temporary companies of engineers were formed. The Train Corps was also officially established in 1872; it was structured in 6 companies, each with 60 men in peacetime and 80 in wartime.

Imperial Guard

The new army also boasted a sizeable Imperial Guard. This *Shimpei* was officially formed in February 1871, in order to have a modern force available while the new conscript army was still being created, and was initially formed with the best Westernized troops from the major domains which had supported the emperor during the Boshin War. Choshu sent a contingent of 3 infantry battalions; Satsuma, 4 infantry battalions and 2 artillery batteries; and Tosa, 2 infantry battalions, 2 cavalry squadrons and 2 batteries of artillery.

In 1873, the Imperial Guard was reorganized under the new title of *Goshimpei*. All the guardsmen who had previously served in the armies of Choshu, Satsuma and Tosa were dismissed, to be replaced by new recruits specially selected from every corner of Japan. Before entering the Goshimpei, each new recruit had to serve for at least six months in a 'line' unit. According to the new 1873 establishment, the Imperial Guard was to comprise 2 infantry regiments, 1 cavalry squadron, 1 artillery battalion, 1 engineer company, and 1 company of the train. These units had the same internal structure as their 'line' equivalents except for the infantry regiments, which had only two battalions each. The artillery battalion was made up of one field and one mountain battery.

Another elite unit raised in 1873, was the **Marine Corps** (see under Plate H3). With only a single mixed battalion, this was disbanded in 1878 and its duties were taken over by sailors of the Imperial Navy.

Police forces

During the Satsuma Rebellion the Imperial Army was decisively supported by new police forces which the Meiji government had had to create after the Boshin War.

In 1868 a new corps of *Shichu Torishimari* ('town constables') was organized, mostly from samurai, to patrol the streets of Tokyo. In 1869 this traditionalist corps was disbanded and replaced by a brigade of *Fuhei* ('city guards'), conscripted from loyal samurai from all over Japan. The Fuhei also served in the Imperial capital, under command of the governor of Tokyo prefecture.

In 1871 the Fuhei were absorbed into a completely reorganized and unified national police force, the *Rasotsu* ('patrolmen'). At first only 3,000 strong and stationed mainly in Tokyo, the force expanded rapidly; by 1877 it had about 18,000 men, and was active in all the prefectures of

Japan (except on Hokkaido). The new force was disciplined and drilled, and played a prominent part in resisting the Satsuma Rebellion. The Meiji government militarized a large number of policemen and formed a duration-only unit known as the *Battoh-Tai* within the army. These acted as something of a 'shock unit' during the rebellion; since most of them were former samurai who were accustomed to face-to-face fighting with the sword, they were better able than the peasant soldiers to sustain close combat with similarly-armed Satsuma samurai.

Satsuma rebel forces

In general, the rebels had a simple and only partly Westernized organization. As noted above, before the outbreak of the Boshin War the forces of the Satsuma domain had not been modernized to the extent achieved by Choshu. In 1877, Saigo Takamori organized his samurai into six large infantry 'battalions' each with 2,000 men, apparently divided into 10 companies of 200 each. During the march northwards he assembled his battalions into three 'divisions': a vanguard with 2,000 samurai in one battalion, a main division with 4,000 in two battalions, and a rearguard with 2,000 in one battalion. The other two battalions were a sort of mobile reserve. Cavalry was practically

A group of 19th-century samurai typical of the feudal contingents, in intricately-laced lamellar armour and carrying traditional weapons. Note (left) the very long, asymmetrical bow, as used to great effect by horsemen, and (centre) the *naginata* polearm – basically, a sword blade mounted on a staff. (New York Public Library)

nonexistent, while the artillery mustered only 200 gunners to man 28 mountain guns, 2 field guns and 30 mortars of assorted sizes.

In April 1877 Saigo reorganized his force into nine smaller and more flexible infantry battalions, which might number anything between 350 and 800 samurai.

WEAPONS

Rifles

In 1840 the number and type of firearms in Japan were still much as they had been in 1600 – perhaps 200,000 simple matchlock muskets, many of them antiques. At that date pioneering innovators such as Takashima Shunan began to buy small quantities of Dutch flintlock muskets. After Perry's arrival in 1853–54 the Japanese purchased larger numbers of Dutch flintlocks, and also began to do business with American dealers. In 1855, for example, a single American merchant ship transported a total of 10,000 flintlocks to Japan, which were sold to the Shogunate for $5 each. Generally, both the Dutch and American flintlocks were elderly pieces which had already seen some 20 years' service before being sold in Japan. It was only in 1862 that the Shogunate, as well as the Choshu and Satsuma clans, started to buy percussion-lock muskets of the new 'Minié' generation (known as *Minieru* in Japan).

Government-bought firearms were normally issued only to the Shogunate's central units, since the feudal contingents of the northern clans preferred their antiquated matchlocks. However, after their general reorganization in 1866 the new Westernized troops of Choshu were all equipped with excellent Minié rifles: thanks to these they were able to defeat the more numerous Shogunate troops during the 'Second Choshu Expedition', and to achieve some decisive early victories in the Boshin War. The samurai of Satsuma were much more resistant to the adoption of modern weapons.

After its humiliation in the 'Second Choshu Expedition', the Shogunate decided to order a large quantity of top-quality rifles from Europe in order to reduce the gap with the Choshu forces. Since the *bakufu* was already anticipating the first French military mission, the chosen weapon was the M1866 Chassepot. A total of 40,000 of these were ordered in May 1867, but the outbreak of the Boshin War prevented the delivery of any more than 3,000 Chassepots. Their superior firearms were one of the key factors behind the decisive victory of the Choshu force in the Imperialist alliance. (Interestingly, during both the Boshin War and the early years of the Meiji government many antiquated matchlocks were more-or-less clumsily converted to percussion with imported parts.)

The widespread adoption of effective firearms during 1865–75 had a great impact on the evolution of Japan's military tactics. It caused the abandonment of armour, which the samurai had continued to use on a large scale until the outbreak of the Boshin War; and it gradually reduced the importance of hand-to-hand fighting in favour of longer-range tactics of fire and manoeuvre.

When the Meiji government began to organize the new Imperial Army with the aid of the second French mission, it had a chaotic mixture of

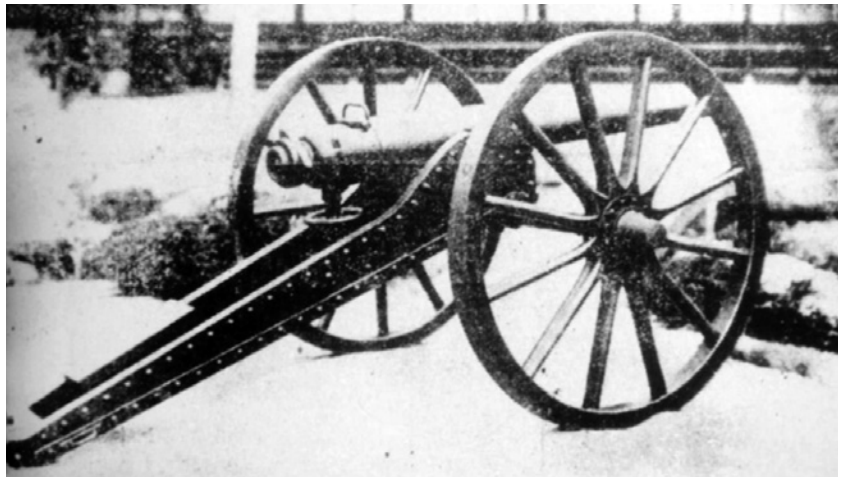
firearms at its disposal. With the abolition of clan militias, the various modern weapons in the different domains were confiscated and assembled with those of the former Shogunate troops in order to equip the new army. To further complicate the picture, during 1870–80 the Imperial government continued to buy large numbers of modern weapons from several different sources; most were surplus from the US Civil War, or superannuated British rifles obtained via Hong Kong. The most popular were the muzzle-loading Pattern 1853 and shorter 'two-band' 1856 Enfield rifles, the 1866 breech-loading Snider-Enfield, and the American 1865 Spencer carbine issued to cavalry, engineers and the train. Other known imports included the Belgian Albini and Prussian Dreyse.

During the Satsuma Rebellion most Imperial infantrymen carried Enfields or Snider-Enfields, while the most common of the small number of modern types available to the rebels was the M1857 Russian rifle. By the end of 1877 the Snider-Enfield was the standard infantry weapon, but three years later the Imperial Army adopted its first entirely Japanese-produced rifle. This M1880 Murata (a rather clumsy amalgamation of features from the Dutch M1871 Beaumont, German M1871 Mauser and French M1874 Gras) was known in Japan as the 'Type 13', because production started during the 13th year of Meiji's reign.

Artillery

Since the only potential threat to the Shogunate had been invasion from the sea, Japanese interest in artillery had been limited to coastal guns. When Perry's squadron arrived in 1853–54 these were quite numerous,

A swordsmith, assisted by his wife, sharpening the blade of a new *katana*. These master-craftsmen were accorded an almost priestly status, since an individual warrior's sword was not merely a workaday weapon but was imbued with great spiritual significance. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)



After victory in the Boshin War, the Meiji government continued the process of standardizing the artillery that had been initiated under the Shogunate, and completed it by the outbreak of the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877. This piece is a breech-loading 12-pdr Armstrong gun, one of 12 locally made on license from the British company. Significantly, they were not originally produced for the Imperial government, but for two provincial clans: six for the Saga, and six for the Hizen. The arming of the new Imperial Army after the Boshin War was a gradual and complex process, involving confiscation of all modern weapons from the former feudal domains, whether foreign imports or licence-built. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

but of small calibre: 3- to 6-pdrs were the most common, and 8-pdrs the heaviest in service. Most of these were extremely old bronze guns, mounted on heavy, immobile carriages, and since practice had been infrequent the gunners were slow and fairly inaccurate. The shogun quickly recognized that his coastal defences had to be improved rapidly if he was to avoid further international humiliations.

From 1855 the Japanese government started to buy large amounts of artillery from abroad, mostly from Dutch and US sources. At the same time, however, Japanese artisans gradually started to learn how to produce cannon by modern methods, and new foundries were created in several of the major cities. Thus began widespread manufacture of guns, usually copied from foreign prototypes, and funded either by the Shogunate or by wealthy clans. Production (mainly of smoothbore weapons) ranged from 3-pdr mountain guns to massive 150-pdr coastal pieces, supplemented by howitzers and mortars. There was no standardization, and during the Boshin War both sides used any artillery pieces that were available. At one extreme, Nagaoka in the Northern Alliance had two of the three Gatling guns then in Japan; at the other, their allies in Sendai even resorted to making rope-bound wooden guns harking back to the 16th–17th centuries, which invariably burst after firing half-a-dozen stone shot.

The chaotic variety of calibres was among the problems facing the French mission to the Shogunate in 1867, and the following year they produced a plan for rationalization. Although the Bushin War prevented more than a start being made, after his victory Emperor Meiji continued the process, and completed it by 1877. Only five basic calibres were retained: 4-pdrs, 6-pdrs, 8-pdrs, 12-pdrs and 16-pdrs. The Imperial Army's artillery eventually comprised seven batteries with a total of 42x 4-pdr muzzle-loading bronze mountain guns, and four batteries with 12x breech-loading 7.5cm Krupp field guns (six of them assigned to the Imperial Guard field battery) and 12x 12-pdr Armstrongs. At the time of the Satsuma Rebellion the Imperial Army also had two Gatling guns and one French Montigny *mitrailleuse,* and the Gatlings were certainly employed during the final battle of Shiroyama. A reform of 1882 would replace all these pieces with new guns produced in Japan.

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PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: 'WESTERNIZED' TROOPS, 1840s–1860s

A1: Infantryman, Takashima Shunan's experimental corps; Nagasaki, 1841

This first Western-style uniform created by Takashima Shunan would become a model for all future modernized units; the dark-blue colour was replaced with white during summertime. Takashima was convinced that easy mobility was fundamental to the success of the new tactics, and that armour was obsolete, so he introduced this relatively close-fitting clothing including trousers worn with gaiters. The conical *tonkyo gasa* 'battle-hat' was designed for use by soldiers drilling with muskets, as being more practical than the traditional wide-brimmed *jingasa.* Note that while he carries an elderly Dutch flintlock musket and ammunition in a belly-pouch, he retains the traditional *katana* sword as a sidearm.

A2: Infantryman, Kobusho Academy, 1856

The cadets of Takashima's later government-sponsored Kobusho Academy used this dark-blue uniform during winter, together with the comfortable and popular winter hood (*toppai zukin*). During summertime they wore the same, but made from lightweight white cloth. The modern training did not neglect instruction in sword-fighting for close-range encounters. Note that while the crossbelt has a percussion-cap pouch, the primary weapon is still an old flintlock, either Dutch or American.

A3: Guardsman, Legation Guards Battalion; Edo, 1866

This guardsman of the *bette gumi* wears a white summer jacket, blue trousers with distinctive white patterning at the top, and the type of summer hood known as a *nirayama zukin*: this had a folding frontal visor/ flap, and often bore an embroidered or brass unit number on the front. By this date increasing numbers of Shogunate infantrymen were being re-equipped with percussion muskets, but this man still has a flintlock. Note the socket bayonet carried in a scabbard at the left hip beside the *katana* tucked into the waist belt.

This fine contemporary photo shows a warrior wearing a multi-plate *kabuto* helmet with a riveted lamellar *shikoro* neck-guard; a horizontally laminated *okegawa-do* cuirass; laced, lamellar, hanging *sode* shoulder-pieces, *kusazuri* below the waist, and *haidate* covering the front of the legs; and sleeves partially armoured with scales and splints. No part of his armour would have been out of place in the 17th century. Here he poses as if practising with his *katana*. Few apart from the very small units of modernized cavalry ever replaced this with European-style swords, and in close combat even musket-armed infantry generally preferred the traditional sword to the bayonet. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

B: SHOGUNATE ARMY, 1860s

B1: Infantryman, *Sampeitai*, 1866

Regulations of 1863 (the first in Japanese history) introduced a uniform echoing that designed in Nagasaki by Takashima Shunan 20 years previously, being dark-blue in winter and white in summer; the trousers could be worn either with or without gaiters. At this date most infantry still wore the older round-brimmed *jingasa* battle-hat, but this soldier has received the narrower *nirayama gasa,* which was more practical. In this case the primary weapon is the excellent British 'three-band' Pattern 1853 Enfield rifle.

B2: Infantryman, *Denshutai*, 1867

When the first French military mission arrived only part of the infantry had received the M1863 uniform, and most troops were distinguishable as being in the shogun's service only by a white band worn somewhere on their hat or clothing. This is the new infantry uniform created by Jules Brunet for the special *Denshutai* unit; he retained the white bands, but now as formal stripes down the outside of the arms of a new waist-length, single-breasted shell jacket, and on the trouser legs. Note the use of black leather European shoes replacing the universal Japanese straw sandals. Brunet introduced this revised version of the old *jingasa*, with a brim of reduced dimensions and bearing a unit device applied or painted on the front. The locally-made white crossbelt equipment incorporates a frog for the *katana*. The rifle illustrated is a P1853 Enfield, but a certain number of Denshutai infantrymen are known to have received the M1866 Chassepot.

B3: Cavalryman, *Denshutai*, 1867

The few cavalrymen of the elite Denshutai wore a medium-blue shell jacket, white breeches, and black riding boots; note too the deep, supportive waist sash reminiscent of France's Spahis and Chasseurs d'Afrique. A soft, dark-blue cap had a black leather visor, and in summertime a white sun cover and neck curtain. The sword is still a *katana*, but this horseman

('light' by Japanese standards) is also equipped with a cavalry lance and a slung percussion carbine, both presumably imported from France. Judging by contemporary sources, this uniform was worn by only very few 'regular' cavalrymen of the Shogunate Army.

C: THE BOSHIN WAR, 1868–1869

C1: Samurai of the *Shinsengumi*; Shogunate Army, Hokkaido, 1869

This man is wearing conventional samurai dress, but without armour. The traditional *guma*, a cap-like wig made of yak hair, was popular among samurai; it could be dyed in various colours, but black was common. A handful of survivors of the Shinsengumi fought bravely as *ronin* volunteers for the short-lived Ezo Republic on Hokkaido, and this man holds the flag of the only republic in Japanese history.

C2: Satsuma infantryman; Imperialist Army, 1868

The Westernized infantry raised in Satsuma wore distinctive light-grey shell-jackets and trousers, and this conical *hatsumuri gasa* hat. We show on the hat a red ribbon tied in a knot *(agemaki)*; the universal field sign of the Imperialists was usually hung on the left sleeve. The rifle is a P853 Enfield, but Satsuma soldiers also had numbers of Snider rifles and even Spencer repeating carbines. Westernized infantrymen from Choshu wore a black *nirayama gasa* (see Plate B1) and a medium-blue shell-jacket and trousers.

Some other domains supporting the Shogunate started to dress their soldiers in similar uniforms: the Ogaki and Kuwana clans, for example, both adopted a simple dark-blue shell-jacket and trousers. The Aizu clan made its soldiers recognizable by a yellow cloth band on the right sleeve, or a white patch bearing the clan name in black worn on the left sleeve.

C3: Officer of Choshu infantry; Imperialist Army, 1868–69

Officers of both the Shogunate and Imperialist modernized units might wear a variety of different Western-style uniforms, usually in dark blue. These normally included a kepi-style cap with or without braid rank distinctions; a single-breasted tunic or double-breasted jacket, of various lengths; full-cut trousers, and black leather boots. However, the various traditional battle-hats were still popular alternatives to the 'foreign' caps. During the 1850s–70s Japanese officers used pistols rarely, always preferring the swords traditional to the samurai caste. The few exceptions were originally locally-made flintlock or later percussion pistols, and from the 1860s imported Colt Navy and Lefaucheux revolvers from the USA and France. This officer carrying a Lefaucheux is one of the relatively few to have replaced his *katana* with a sword of Western design.

D: THE SATSUMA REBELLION, 1877

D1: High-ranking samurai, rebel army

In 1877 a certain number of Satsuma samurai who followed Saigo Takamori continued to dress and armour themselves for battle in the 'old way', and to fight with traditional weapons, in order to preserve the honoured customs of their caste. Despite their extraordinary courage and determination, however, they could do very little against the counter-offensive launched by the massively stronger and better-armed forces of the Emperor Meiji.

D2: Samurai infantryman, rebel army

The Satsuma infantrymen did not wear uniforms, but their traditional samurai clothing distinguished only by a white armband as a field sign. This fighter's primary weapon is a percussion rifle, and the only other 'modern' element of his appearance is a white crossbelt supporting a cap pouch on his chest and a cartridge pouch behind his right hip. He carries, of course, the *katana*, tucked into a rolled waist sash. Apparently even those few rebels who had modern firearms generally preferred to fight with their swords, considering the use of rifles as less honourable.

Striking watercolour sketch by Jules Brunet, capturing the appearance of an infantryman of the shogun's army dressed in the M1863 uniform, with a fold-down *nirayama gasa,* a dark-blue single-breasted Western-style jacket (any buttons being obscured here) and trousers, with local sandals. He is armed with a percussion musket, and has a waist belt and a single crossbelt supporting his frogged sword. Another contemporary image from the Boshin War shows a low white turban knotted at the back of the head in place of a hat, and the sword and a cartridge pouch at left and right respectively on a knotted white sash in place of a leather belt. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

D3: Patrolman of *Battoh-Tai*, Imperial Army

After Imperial troops in the south-west suffered significant losses in the early stages of the rebellion, the decision was taken to militarize part of the well-disciplined, equipped and drilled *Rasotsu* national 'patrol' police force. They were formed into a war-duration-only unit termed the *Battoh-Tai*,

which was regarded as a kind of 'shock troop'. Their uniform was a dark-blue single-breasted coat with gold rank rings (where appropriate) around the cuffs, and a dark blue cap with gold rank piping and badge. In addition to his Western sword, this policeman carries an imported 0.36in Colt Navy revolver.

E: *SHIMPEI* IMPERIAL GUARD, 1871–73

E1: Private 1st class, Infantry

Steps to organize the Guard began in 1870, to fill the security gap between the destruction of the Shogunate forces in the Boshin War and the establishment of the new Imperial Army. The *Shimpei* was officially formed in February 1871, and was drawn from the best Westernized units created by the clans which had supported the Emperor Meiji's restoration. The Guard infantry consisted of three Choshu batallions, four from Satsuma, and two from Tosa. During 1870 regulations prescribed these elegant French-style uniforms, which seem to have been the first genuinely Westernized military uniforms, in their detail and completeness, ever introduced in Japan. However, they would last only until 1873, when the complete reorganization of the army brought new dress regulations.

The infantrymen of the Shimpei were recognizable by their light-blue trousers with yellow sidestripes. For parade only, the square-visored kepi is dressed with a falling plume in the national colours of red and white. The yellow-piped blue tunic with red facings vaguely recalls the French 1863 pattern in outline, but this man's rank is indicated by double piping above the pointed cuffs. The rifle is still a 'three-band' Enfield, and a *katana* is carried in a white waist sash in 'the old way'.

E2: Private 1st class, Cavalry

The small cavalry branch of the Shimpei consisted of just two squadrons, both sent by the Tosa clan. According to the 1870 dress regulations, troopers wore a distinctive green uniform with a red kepi and breeches. Cavalry uniforms were also distinguished by red shoulder straps, piped yellow; yellow was the piping colour for all the Shimpei's units. Note the Imperial chrysanthemum motif on the valise and saddle-wallet covers.

E3: Private 2nd class, Artillery

Initially the Imperial Guard had four batteries of artillery, two each being provided by the Satsuma and Tosa clans. Artillerymen were dressed similarly to infantrymen above the waist, but were recognizable by their red trousers with black sidestripes. Unlike E1, he has retained the sword-bayonet delivered with his Enfield rifle.

F: IMPERIAL ARMY, 1874–77

F1: Staff sergeant, Imperial Guard infantry

The dress regulations of 1873 prescribed this new uniform for the infantry of the Imperial Guard, which was completely reorganized during that year. It comprised a shako in the distinctive colour of each branch of service: red for the infantry, green for the cavalry, and yellow for the artillery. As on the M1870 uniform, there was a brass badge on the front of the headgear, but the plumes were now all-white. The new dark-blue tunic had piping to the collar and side pockets, and tape 'loops' on the chest and edging to the front and bottom edges in the new distinctive branch colours, which also appeared as trouser stripes. The same colours were used for the basic rank rings around the cuffs, but note this senior NCO's silver upper ring. The Snider rifle carried by both this figure and F2 had become the Japanese infantry's standard weapon by the end of the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion.

F2: Private 1st class, Infantry

The 'line' infantry received their first dress regulations only in 1873. This practical uniform, worn during the Satsuma Rebellion, proved easy to mass-produce. A dark-blue forage cap usually had a brass frontal badge indicating branch-of-service, and was generally fitted with a black leather visor; its band was in branch-of-service colour. The short dark-blue jacket had rank rings in branch colour around the cuffs (one or two, for privates 2nd or 1st class respectively); dark-blue trousers confined by white gaiters

Ainu man wearing the everyday tribal clothing of northern Hokkaido. After more than 200 years of sporadic warfare between Japanese and Ainu, this people were driven out of northern Honshu and confined to Hokkaido by about 1600; subsequently a Shogunate army followed, defeating them in 1786. The central government established a loose Japanese colonization of southern Hokkaido supervised by the loyal Matsumae clan, and as settler numbers grew to near parity with the Ainu intermittent guerrilla warfare continued until the 1870s. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)

had branch-colour side-stripes, and were worn over black leather shoes. Officially the 1873 'line' branch colours were red for infantry, green for cavalry, yellow for artillery, white for engineers, and medium blue for the train, but until 1880 the infantry used either yellow or red, which caused some confusion. Typically for the Satsuma Rebellion, this soldier has red cuff rings, but 'temporary' yellow cap band and trouser stripes.

F3: Lieutenant, Artillery, summer service dress

Dress regulations of 1873 specified two dark-blue uniforms for officers: parade dress, with a kepi and double-breasted tunic, and service dress, with a forage cap and patrol jacket. The all-white summertime version of the latter is illustrated here, complete with sun curtain. The parade kepi had gold rank piping and a frontal badge. The tunic had collar and pointed cuffs in the branch colour, and large gold 'Austro-Hungarian'-style sleeve knots indicating rank. The service dress forage cap had piping and band in branch colour. The patrol jacket had black frontal frogging; black fur trim to the collar, cuffs, side-pockets, front and bottom edges; and black sleeve knots. The trousers of both uniforms were dark-blue with piping in branch colour.

G: IMPERIAL ARMY & AINU, 1874–77

G1: Private 2nd class, Imperial Guard Cavalry, 1874

The uniform introduced for the Guard cavalry squadron by the 1873 regulations comprised a blue tunic and red breeches, with green branch distinctions including these Guard chest 'loops'. Japan possessed surprisingly few horses large and strong enough for modern military service. Many attempts were made to improve the breeding by buying in horses from abroad, but these did not achieve adequate results much before the end of the century.

G2: Private 2nd class, Line Cavalry, 1874

Unlike infantry and artillery, who generally wore forage caps for all but parade occasions, cavalry of both Guard and line units employed this kepi much more frequently. Until 1880 they also retained this tunic rather than a shorter jacket. The tunic is faced at collar and cuffs in the green cavalry branch colour, and piped yellow. His primary weapon is an M1865 Spencer repeating carbine, which was carried slung.

G3: Ainu chieftain, 1877

This clan chieftain is armed with a traditional mace, as well as a *katana* bought from Japanese merchants in southern Hokkaido. Bows and spears were also used, both for hunting and in the brief wars which were common between neighbouring communities (at times when they were not united against the Japanese incomers). Both his segmented helmet and long lamellar armour are made of leather; corselets might also be made of sealskin. In general terms, the Ainu had much in common with the aboriginal peoples in the Russian territories of Sakhalin and Kamchatka, both ethnically and culturally. They were excellent horsemen, and used the sturdy Hokkaido ponies very effectively; they also used skis in winter, and simple canoes (particularly for night raids behind Japanese lines). After the Boshin War the Imperial government tightened its grip by increased colonization, forming a Hokkaido Militia of Japanese settlers in 1874, but they still considered Hokkaido a wild frontier zone – the Ainu were excluded from compulsory military service. By the turn of the century, Japanese land-seizure and interbreeding had already almost acculturated the Ainu, who were not officially recognized as a distinct ethnic group.

H: SHOGUNATE & IMPERIAL NAVIES, 1850s–1870s

H1: Captain, Shogunate Navy, 1868

Although trained by Dutch instructors or actually in the Netherlands (including Enomoto Takeaki, future commander of the Navy and President of the Ezo Republic), the officers of the Shogunate navy wore undress uniforms which were heavily influenced by Britain's Royal Navy. A small dark navy-blue visored cap was worn, with gold piping and badge; and the double-breasted 'frock' (usually worn open, over a matching waistcoat) had gold braid rank rings around the cuffs complete with the RN's 'curl' in the top ring.

The Shogunate acquired its first steam warship, the *Kanko Maru*, from the Dutch in 1854, and this was used as a training vessel at the Nagasaki Naval School organized the following year with Dutch instructors. A second was bought in 1857, and from 1865 the Shogunate employed a French naval engineer to supervise its own ship-building programme in new yards at Nagasaki and Yokosuka. Meanwhile, the *bakufu* ordered some of the richest domains to acquire their own warships; the Satsuma clan were the first, creating their own training centre and sending officers abroad for instruction. Choshu and some smaller domains followed this example; by 1868 the Shogunate Navy had eight warships and 36 auxiliary vessels, while Satsuma had nine ships and Choshu five.

H2: Sailor, Nagasaki Naval School, 1855

The *Nagasaki Kaigun Denshuju* trained many of the future officers of the Shogunate navy. Its cadets were dressed in this simple uniform, with a jacket vertically striped in medium- and dark-blue, and wore the same distinctive top-knot hairstyle as the students of the Kobusho Academy. In 1859 the academy was moved to Edo, where it continued to train increasing numbers of all ranks. During the Boshin War the Shogunate's sailors served ashore as infantry on several occasions.

H3: NCO, Imperial Marine Corps, 1873–78

A small Imperial Marine Corps was raised during 1873, as a mixed battalion of naval infantry and naval artillery, but was disbanded as early as 1878. During its brief existence it was heavily influenced by its British chief instructor, an officer of the Royal Marine Artillery. The headgear peculiar to the corps was this low, domed, dark-blue cap with black leather visor and chinstrap, bearing on the crown edge-piping and five lines radiating from a small pompon, in yellow for the naval infantry component and red for the artillery. The brass frontal badge showed crossed rifles for the infantry and crossed cannon for the artillery. The short jacket had a yellow collar, shoulder straps and piping; the trousers, by contrast, had red trim at the side seams (narrow for naval infantry and broader for artillery). Senior ranks were identified by yellow double-peaked 'mountain' insignia embroidered on both sleeves.

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OSPREY PUBLISHING
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com
www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd

First published in Great Britain in 2020

© Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2020

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB 9781472837080; eBook 9781472837066; ePDF 978/1472837097; XML 9781472837073

Editor: Martin Windrow
Map by Gabriele Esposito
Index by Zoe Ross
Typeset by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity.

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Dedication

To my parents Maria Rosaria and Benedetto, for supporting my passion for military history from the beginning, and for sharing with me a fascination for Japanese culture. Like the samurai described in this book, they still 'live in the old way'.

Author's note & acknowledgements

The events covered in this book were fictionalized in Edward Zwick's spectacular 2003 film *The Last Samurai.* However, readers might care to note that as well as placing an American instead of a French officer in the forefront of the action, the film elides events that occurred over nearly a decade into a single dramatic narrative.

Special thanks are due to the series editor Martin Windrow, for supporting the idea of this book, and for his valued help throughout its preparation for print. I also gratefully acknowledge the central contribution of Giuseppe Rava, whose astonishing colour plates bring to life a forgotten page in the history of old Japan.

Some of the illustrations published in this book are obtained from the Digital Collections of the New York Public Library; the original files are available at: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/

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PAGE 3
Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837–1913), the last Shogun of Japan. During his brief period of rule (August 1866–November 1867), he tried to preserve the 250-year dominance of the Tokugawa clan, but the defections of the Choshu, Satsuma and Tosa domains to the Emperor Meiji proved decisive for the fall of the Shogunate. In this photo Yoshinobu wears a French-style full dress uniform which he adopted after the arrival of the first French military mission in January 1867. (Public domain/Wikimedia Commons)